

HIGHLAND COUSINS

William Black



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HIGHLAND COUSINS

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF

"A PRINCESS OF THULE," "MACLEOD OF DARE," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HIGHLAND COUSINS.



CHAPTER I.

COUNCILLOR V. STATION-MASTER.

EARLY one afternoon, the councillor, the station-master, the station-master's wife, Jess Maclean, and Barbara left the town by way of the Dunstaffnage road, making for the golf-links facing the western sea. And of course Peter McFadyen was the life and soul of this little group; he was overjoyed at Jessie's condescension in coming—indeed this was but part of the marked favour she had shown him ever since he had begun to take an active interest in Allan's welfare; and he was looking forward with delight to another opportunity of displaying his prowess and skill. He talked and laughed and made merry jests; he was all eager anticipation;

and when they faced the steep highway leading away from Duntroone, he it was who led, with his chest manfully puffed out.

"There's nothing," he maintained, "like a good stiff walk for giving free play to the muscles; and free play to the muscles is the *seeny quah non* on the links. A soople wrist and a springy ankle—and there ye are! What's the use of standing up like a stick? Dod, I'd like to take half the golfers I see and send them to get lessons from a dancing-master!"

Nor were his high spirits at all damped when the little party had to pass the Cemetery.

"The poor bodies in there," said he, with much cheerfulness, "are at rest; and we'll be the same in our turn. But in the meantime—in the meantime," Peter remarked, with a twinkle in his eye, "my opinion is like that of the idiot-laddie at the funeral: 'I'm glad it's no me.'"

And again when they left the highway to cross Colquhoun's farm he kept in front in order to open the gates; and thus he was enabled to discover that ahead of them there was nothing more formidable than a number of cows, the bull being away down in a

hollow near a small loch. Whereupon the cunning Peter affected to regard those animals with some caution.

“That bull of Colquhoun’s,” said he, turning to the women-folk, “is a terrible ill-natured beast; but the only way is to pay no heed to him; you must not shrink back on any account. You just follow me now when I open the gate——”

Here the station-master—a tall, thin, angular man, with fiery red hair—burst out laughing.

“Peter, my friend,” said he, “you need not be afraid of a lot of cows. Yonder’s the bull away down by the loch.”

Peter looked round and elevated his eyebrows in well-simulated astonishment.

“Yes, indeed,” he observed. “I do believe you’re right. Not that it matter whether he’s there or here. The one way with a bull is to pay no heed to him. If he had been within a yard of this gate, you’d have seen me open it in his face. There’s but the one way with a bull,” reiterated Peter—as he piloted the women past the cows.

Presently they came within view of the wide western seas and the hills; and a wonderful sight it was; for while all the

world around them, both land and water, lay under a mysterious, brooding semi-darkness, because of one unbroken cloud that stretched across the whole of the over-arching heavens, away out by Mull and Morven there appeared to be another world altogether, a world of mountains shining as it were behind a soft veil of sunlight, in ethereal tones of orange-red and silver-grey and rose. No wonder the idle wanderers paused to look; but the councillor was impatient for the fray, and hurried them on.

Of a sudden Jess stopped.

“What’s that?” said she, staring at a whin-bush a little way up the bank. “Is there somebody there? I’m sure I saw something or somebody looking at me—just for a moment——”

“I’ll soon find out,” said the councillor, valiantly—for in the protection of weak feminine human nature he was afraid of neither robber nor rabbit. At once he sprang up the bank, with surprising agility; he went round by the back of the whins; and there he found Niall Gorach, crouching down like a hare in her form. He got hold of the half-witted lad by the collar, and hauled him into the road.

“Ye young scoundrel, I’ll teach ye to go frightening folk in that way——”

But Jess directly interposed.

“Indeed, you will not harm him,” said she. “I have not seen Niall since the time he found Allan Henderson lying out among the rocks; and I’m sure we are all very much indebted to him; and, Mr. McFadyen, it would be wiser-like if you were to give the lad a sixpence and he would carry your clubs for you round the links.”

Niall looked from one to the other—with perhaps a side glance to see if there was any way of escape from both. But when McFadyen, delighted to obey Jess in all things, promptly unslung from his shoulder his bag of golfing implements and handed it over, the half-witted creature took possession of it in quite a docile way, and then he turned to her who had interceded for him.

“Am I to get a sixpence?” he asked, timidly.

“Yes, indeed,” said Jess, in friendly fashion.

“And he’ll not strike me?”

“He is not thinking of any such thing!” she answered him—and the assurance seemed sufficient.

A few minutes thereafter Niall sidled up to her again, and said in an undertone—

“I’ll show ye the white stag.”

“What white stag?” she asked, with her grey eyes smiling in a way that generally inspired confidence.

“The white stag that’s in the sanctuary of the Creannoch Forest. There’s none but me has seen it. I’ll take you there—I’ll show it to ye.” But at this point Niall’s services were required; they had arrived at the teeing-ground; the great contest was about to begin.

And now the councillor, to whom had been accorded the honour of opening the game, selected his driver and took out from the pocket one of the cream-white balls. But he was very jocular all the same; he wished to show that, even in the presence of these fair spectators, he was not in the least nervous; other players might play in solemn silence—he was not to be tyrannised over by either precept or custom. And he was still talking and jesting as he stooped down to form a little tee of sand, on the top of which he placed his ball; and even when he rose again, and got hold of his club, the inward seriousness that had possession

of him was not allowed to appear on his face.

"You'll just stand well back," said he, facetiously, "for golf-clubs sometimes run away wi' the player, and I would not like to do you an injury."

Then he addressed himself to the ball; he heaved his shoulders slightly, to make sure that everything was free; he took a last look at the far height which it was his aim to reach; he clenched his teeth; with his left heel slightly raised, and his eyes fixed determinedly on the white object before him, he elevated his club—up, and up, and up—until from well behind his back it came forward and down again with a most mighty 'swipe.' There was a whistle of cleft air; the councillor spun round on his left foot, so prodigious had been the force of the stroke; and when everybody's gaze had returned from asking what had happened, it was startlingly evident that the ball still remained on the tee. Peter broke into a laugh. It was a hearty laugh—not like the ironical grin that appeared on the features of the station-master.

"Dod," said he, in humorous self-disparagement, "that's a fine one! That's well done!

That's a good beginning! But better late luck than no luck——”

“Man, Peter,” said his opponent, “were ye for driving the ball to Banavie?”

“Keep your breath to cool your own parritch,” retorted McFadyen, confidently. “I’m no done with you yet, Jamie. The game’s young.”

For he was again addressing himself to the ball. And this time he did manage to hit it, and that with savage energy; but somehow something went wrong; it flew off at an oblique angle, it rose unnecessarily high, and almost immediately dropped at the foot of the meadow, where there was a ditch covered over with whins and withered flag and fern.

“Ye’re in a mess this time, Peter,” observed the station-master, grimly, as he proceeded to make a tee for himself.

But Peter had too much dignity, and was too anxious to stand well in the eyes of the fair, to betray resentment or exasperation.

“This driver’s fit for nothing,” said he, regarding the club with great disfavour. “It’s forever heeling or toeing. The only tool that’s fit to drive with is a bulger: catch me coming out with anything else

again! Well, let's see what you can do, Jamie."

For Gilmour was now about to play his first stroke. And when he did so the ball flew away with a fine metallic 'pirr' that sounded pleasantly to all ears but Peter's, it skimmed the wide meadow, slightly rising before the end of its flight, it got clear over a dangerous hazard formed by a burn banked with whins, and on falling it was conspicuous on the face of the declivity beyond. This patent success of his enemy was even more trying to the councillor's temper than anything that had happened before. But he bore up well. He said not a word. And it was with a certain air of calm composure that he walked away towards the ditch to look for his ball, his companions following.

When they came up there was a different story to tell. The councillor could not find the ball, nor was it likely he should ever find it, amid this waste of withered herbage and pools of stagnant water; yet nevertheless he was hunting and probing hither and thither, and viciously hacking at the whins with his iron cleek, whilst the anger at his heart was now becoming outwardly visible.

"Do not mind it, Mr. McFadyen," said

the sympathetic Mrs. Gilmour. "Take another ball and go on from where you are."

But Peter, speechless with vexation, would continue his probing and hacking.

"Three minutes gone out of the five," said the station-master, playfully, holding his watch in his hand.

"James!" remonstrated his wife, in indignant tones. "Ye would not claim any such thing! Mr. McFadyen must take another ball, and go on from where he is."

"And who in all creation ever heard of women laying down the law on a golf-links?" cried the ungallant Gilmour; and then he added, with a cruel smile: "Four minutes gone, Peter."

And at last the embittered councillor had to abandon the unavailing search.

"The first hole is yours, Gilmour," he said, gloomily. "But the first hole is not the game, I would have ye remember that."

"Well I am aware of it," said the station-master, blithely. "And you know what they say: A good ending is better than a bad beginning."

And indeed fortune was not disposed to keep up a perpetual quarrel with the councillor; it would hardly have been fair,

considering who were looking on, and considering his eager desire to shine. At the very outset of their progress to the next hole the station-master got into trouble; the drive which he led off was a good drive in every respect except direction; at the end of its flight the ball disappeared over a stone wall and had no doubt dropped into the farm-road on the other side. This raised Mr. McFadyen's spirits not a little. When he came to play, he paid scrupulous attention to his tee; he placed the ball most carefully; he paused for a second or two to make sure of the lie of the land; and when he struck, it was with all the swing and freedom and art he could command. Away went the small white globe, in a gradually rising curve; they watched and watched it; they watched and watched it—against the softly grey sky; and when at length it subsided, at a great distance off, and out in the open, joy returned to the councillor's heart once more.

“Well done!” said Jess, quite honestly.

“Well done indeed!” cried Mrs. Gilmour.

And even Barbara, who had been gazing away towards the Sound of Mull, turned to see what was going on.

“It’s a little better—a little better,” said Mr. McFadyen, with a fine indifference. “One cannot always be playing like a born idiot. Now let’s go and see what Gilmour is about.”

By this time the station-master had clambered over the dyke, and had succeeded in finding his ball, which lay in a deep rut in the road. And now the secret exultation of the councillor could hardly be any longer suppressed. He called up the women-folk to look over the wall at Gilmour’s most miserable plight. For truly the station-master was in ill-luck. Twice he got the ball well out of the rut, and twice it struck the top of the wall, falling back into the road again. Peter laughed loud and long over this amusing spectacle.

“Hit him again, Jimmie!” he cried. “Dod, it’s grand exercise for ye! But keep your temper!—Keep your temper now!—I’ve seen more than one club bashed in that road.”

Eventually the station-master got out of all his difficulties; but they had sadly handicapped him; and when at length he and the councillor had reached the green, there could be little doubt about the result; the proud and pleased Peter won this hole easily.

And so, with varying success and mishap they made their way along and across these rude and untutored links, until they were nearing the dreaded Pinnacle.

“Wait till ye see Gilmour at the Pinnacle,” Peter had said, with a sly wink, to Jess Maclean. “Jamie’s temper can stand anything and everything—except the Pinnacle.”

They were now come to a rising slope beyond which was an unseen hollow, while beyond the hollow again rose a considerable height the steep face of which was scarred across by little ridges, of a muddy and sloppy nature. The temptation here placed before the ingenuous player is to try to get over this desperate hazard by one daring drive from the tee—the common result of which is that he lands in the intervening valley, or strikes the impossible face of the hill, a still more hopeless fate; while the cunning practitioner, playing a half-stroke from the tee, is content to reach the top of the hither slope, from which he has a better chance of sending his ball right on to the summit of the Pinnacle. It was with a subdued smile that Peter watched the station-master make his preparations.

“Now for a good one, Jamie,” said he,

with diabolical guile. "The Pinnacle's always making a fool of ye! Let's see what you can do now!"

But, whether by accident or design the station-master made no sort of display; his ball landed at the top of the near slope, lying well for the next drive, and considerably dashing the councillor's baleful anticipations. Peter now played, getting to about the same place. Then came Gilmour's opportunity; and with a very excellent 'swipe,' that earned the generous applause of the spectators, he sent his ball sailing away over that ugly chasm until it dropped on the opposite crest: at last he had conquered the Pinnacle!

Now of course Peter could do no better, but at least he might do as well; and so, with anxious heart but resolute mien, he made ready. He looked at the horrid cliff, with its steps and stairs of sloppy herbage; he looked at the tiny white globe before him; he pursed up his lips firmly—he raised his club—he struck a manful stroke. Alas! that such things should be—the ball did indeed clear the chasm, but all too unmistakably did it alight on the opposite face; it hesitated for a moment; then the white spot was seen to come hopping slowly and quietly into the

valley below. It was now the station-master's turn to jeer ; and jeer he did—in such a fashion that his wife had angrily and shamefacedly to protest.

What followed is almost too painful for narration ; except in this way, that the spectacle of a man wrestling with his agony has always been understood to arouse woman's sympathy ; and Jess Maclean was looking on. No matter how the councillor fought and strove, changing the trusted niblick for the crafty sand-iron, or entrusting his fortunes to the useful cleek, that small white sphere, with a remorseless and malignant pertinacity, would return from the greatest height he could reach, sliding, hopping, rolling, until it lay contentedly in front of him.

“Put it in your pocket, Peter—put the ball in your pocket, man !” the station-master shouted from the top of the Pinnacle—mercilessly returning the taunts that had so often been addressed to himself.

And this, after a few more frantic trials, Peter was constrained to do, for by this time the evening was wearing on ; but all the same he was determined to conceal his bitter mortification ; Jess must see that in the most

tragic circumstances he could preserve his equanimity.

“Jamie,” he called, “come away down out o’ that, man: it’s time to be making for home. The afternoon’s yours; we’ll live to fight another day.”

So the Homeric contest was ended, and the shades of evening fell; but the overhead sky was clearing, as they made their way to the sea shore; and by the time they entered the woods skirting the coast there was some suggestion of moonlight wandering down through the black stems, and causing a shadow here and there on the ancient-worn pathway. When they got into the open again, the moon was found to be high in the south-east, with a halo of pale lemon hue around it; there were a few solitary clouds hanging high that still had a lingering touch of saffron about them; the waters down the Sound of Kerrara were of a cold metallic grey. The councillor was in great form. This was quite a picturesque and romantic ending to their afternoon’s diversion. In the woods he had lifted up his voice and sang; and now, fronting the open bay, he sang; and the burden of his song, shrill as it might be, was the praise of young Jessie the Flower

of Dunblane. He might just as well have said Duntroone: they all knew.

*'Is lovely young Jessie,
Is lovely young Jessie,
Is lovely young Jessie, the Flower of Dunblane.'*

—thus he skirled away, with many gay flourishes, until they were nearing the town, when decorum demanded silence.

And of course the first thing they did, when they got into Campbell Street, was to go and report themselves to the widow; and the first person they saw—or at least the most conspicuous—when they entered the little parlour, was Jack Ogilvie, the purser of the *Aros Castle*. Barbara seemed to waken out of a dream.

CHAPTER II.

AN INTRUDER.

“AND how are you yourself, Mr. McFadyen?” said Ogilvie, when he had paid his respects to the two girls, and resumed his seat. “I’m glad to see by the newspaper that you can hold your own at the Council—that you’re not afraid even of the Provost himself.”

Now there was a kind of gay assurance—a happy-go-lucky fashion of making himself at home—about the young man that the councillor keenly resented; but at the same time this compliment to his courage in debate somewhat mollified Peter.

“I’ll not deny,” said he, sententiously, “that there are occasions when it is one’s duty to stand by one’s opinions, even at the risk of being considered quarrelsome. When a man has convictions he must maintain them.

And I have never budged from my position that, with regard to the water-supply, Loch-a-Voulin is the only and proper loch——”

“What is this your Gaelic Choir are after?” Jack Ogilvie asked, turning lightly to Jess Maclean.

“I have not heard of anything, then,” she answered.

“Oh, they are meditating great doings,” said he. “It appears that a number of members of the Glasgow Choir are coming through; and your Choir want to entertain them—a concert and ball, or something of the sort; and they have already asked me to act as M.C. Well, I was not quite sure to say yes or no, when I remembered that Miss Barbara had promised me a dance on the first opportunity of the kind, and of course that decided me.”

Instantly all eyes were turned to Barbara, with surprised inquiry. Where had Barbara learnt to dance? And how could this conversation between her and the Purser have taken place? The girl herself, showing the greatest distress and confusion, was silent.

“Ay, and where did you find a dancing-master at Knockalanish?” asked Mrs. Maclean, smiling good-naturedly enough.

But Barbara seemed to consider the question a taunt.

“There’s plenty on the island can dance very well,” said she, “and the one can show the other.”

So the mystery remained a mystery ; for Jack Ogilvie, perceiving that his chance remark had caused some trouble, immediately came to her rescue and turned the conversation into another channel. Moreover, he could talk well. Before securing his present employment, he had made many voyages, and seen many places and things ; he had an abundance of amusing experiences ; he was accustomed, because of his good looks and his pleasant manners, to be made much of ; and he chatted away—to Mrs. Maclean, to Jess, to Barbara—freely and cheerfully, and as one who knew he was welcome. All this but increased the councillor’s profound chagrin. What right had this intruder to come into the sacred circle ? There was an air of audacious youth about him that was in itself offensive. Then Mr. McFadyen, who was accustomed to boast of his knowledge of the world, found himself driven into a narrow and cramped little provincial corner by this gay conversationalist who had been everywhere

and had seen everything. What was the use of vaunting Ben Nevis and Ben Cruachan before one who had beheld the pale snows of Mount Etna towering above the burnt and torrid slopes of Sicily? What was the use of talking about the Government gunboat just come into the bay to one who had watched a Mediterranean squadron steam into the Piræus? The hilly semicircle of Duntroone looked well enough as one came sailing into the harbour; but perhaps it was hardly so impressive as the domes and minarets and gardens of Stamboul seen from across the waters of the Golden Horn. And, though Mr. Boyd's cairngorms were no doubt very fine, and his settings of Iona stones ingenious and intricate, they could not well be compared with the treasures of the museums which this young man had carelessly visited in his various wanderings. And the worst of it was that he had no swagger about him. He had no need of swagger; he was too handsome, too good-humoured, too used to favouring glances and smiles. And alas! he was dowered with the terrible dower of youth, that is so merciless in its victories.

But if the councillor fretted and fumed in

his provincial corner, that was not the mood in which Barbara Maclean, who had entirely recovered from her momentary confusion, sate and listened to all this easy, brilliant, discursive talk. Never before had she had such an opportunity of studying Ogilvie's appearance, of observing all those elegancies and refinements and perfections that in her eyes appeared to separate him from the rest of mankind. New fascinations, new attractions, were every moment being revealed to her. For example, his hair, that was of a light golden-brown, with something more than a tendency to curl, was cut particularly short about the nape of the neck; but, short as it was, there was no suggestion of stubble; on the contrary it lay about in little silken waves on the fair and sun-tanned skin. His laugh, too, was honest and unaffected; it seemed to be the expression of a naturally happy temperament; life appeared to go well with him. And of course Jack Ogilvie, whatever he might be talking or laughing about, could not but be conscious of the presence of an extremely pretty girl, who, besides, paid him rapt attention; and if he did not exactly lay himself out to captivate, at least he had no thought of hiding his

light under a bushel. The councillor, disappointed and angry, had relapsed into a sullen silence.

But Mr. McFadyen had his innings when the dazzling sun-god had departed.

“There is nothing I despise so much,” he declared with emphasis, “as a flippant young man. For where there is flippancy there is no depth; and where there is no depth there is no stabeelity; and where there is no stabeelity, there can be nothing to look forward to but the downward road to wreck and ruin. The creature of a summer day—a fluff of a candle—a butterfly blown by the wind! I appeal to you, Mrs. Maclean,” he went on, earnestly. “What would happen to us if we took no heed of the serious interests of life? Look at the questions that press close on us—look at the water-supply—look at vaccination—look at the housing of the poor: did ye see the last report?—the terribly overcrowding——”

“Indeed I did,” said the little widow. “And I was just shocked to see the rate of infant immortality—it’s fearful to think of——”

“Did not I say so—did not I say so?” he exclaimed—as though he had discovered

some dark connection between Jack Ogilvie and that Herodian slaughter. "If we do not face the problems of existence, we perish; it's the one thing or the other; gallivanting about like a butterfly will not do. The world's not made up of idleness and amusement——"

At this point Mr. McFadyen stopped. It may have occurred to him that he was entirely on the wrong tack. For had he not consistently been, especially before these young folk, the foremost champion of all sorts of gaieties and sports and pastimes, and anxious to display his own proficiency therein? These gloomy preachments did not become one who excelled in the graceful Varsoviana, who sang "When other lips" with touching pathos, who could throw the hammer against any of the younger men, or drive a ball from the Pinnacle right on to the next green. Happily, at this moment, Barbara stepped in to afford him the means of retrieving his error.

"If the Gaelic Choir are to have dancing," said she, "will it be in the Drill Hall?"

"Ah, there now," rejoined the councillor, with some return to his ordinary buoyancy; "there, now, will be a fine evening; and no

doubt it will be in the Drill Hall; and I should not wonder if the Glasgow Choir gave us some part-singing before the dance. Of course, it may be presumptuous in me to assume that I am to be invited——”

“They could not do without ye, Mr. McFadyen!” cried the widow.

“But if all goes well,” continued the councillor, modestly, “I hope to have Miss Jessie and her cousin under my escort, just as we were before.”

“And this time,” said Barbara, glancing somewhat nervously from the one to the other, “this time will we wait a little while for the dancing?”

“Oh, yes, if you would like,” the widow responded, with her usual magnanimity. “I will trust to Mr. McFadyen to look after you both and bring you safe home.”—Almost immediately thereafter, with some trifling excuse, Barbara left those others to themselves; she crossed the street, went up the stair, and entered the house; and there she made straight for her own room, and for the two drawers in which lay the odds and ends of millinery she had managed to acquire since the occasion of Mrs. McAskill’s ball.

Apparently the handsome young Purser

had found the hour or so he had passed in Mrs. Maclean's parlour pleasant enough ; for he got into the way of looking in of an evening, especially when he had any intelligence to convey about the visit of the Glasgow Choir ; while Barbara, under pretext that she wished to learn how to become useful in the shop, went regularly over at the close of each day, whoever might chance to call. On the other hand, Allan Henderson was conspicuously absent ; he was busy about the starting of his Latin Class ; and he was keen to have all things well in train before bringing his budget of news to this little circle of friends. Perhaps, if success were assured, or even seen to be probable, Barbara might be attracted ? Hitherto she had shown the scantiest interest in his doings ; but perchance these larger schemes might win her attention ? And she knew what was spurring him on—she knew what hopes he had formed : it might be that this future to which he was looking she would recognise as also her own.

At length one evening the schoolmaster, his brain a chaos of wild anticipations, went along to the tobacconist's shop, and entered, and tapped at the partly-opened door of the parlour.

"Come in, Allan," the widow called at once.

But already he had perceived that a stranger was there—a stranger in one sense, though of course every one in Duntroone knew by sight the Purser of the *Aros Castle*.

"Where have you been all this while?" continued Mrs. Maclean, cheerfully, "We were thinking of sending round the bellman to find you out. And surely you know Mr. Ogilvie?"

The two young men nodded—the one lightly and carelessly, the other stiffly enough.

"And is the rain off yet?" she asked again—for there was an awkward pause.

Allan made some kind of answer. Already his mind was filled with vague misgivings. This stranger appeared to be but little of a stranger; he seemed to be on the most friendly and familiar terms with everybody; he had installed himself and made himself at home in a surprisingly short time. And what now happened, simple as the incident was, only served to increase the school-master's nebulous apprehensions.

"Oh, was it raining when you came in?" Barbara said, in a very amiable way, to

Ogilvie. Therewith she crossed over to the peg on which he had hung his cap, and she took down the cap and examined it. "Yes, indeed," said she, "And how careless you are!" With that she went and got a cloth; she brought the cap along to the gasalier; and very carefully she polished the two brass buttons and the narrow band of glazed leather. It was a goodnatured little action, perhaps of no import; but in the eyes of Allan Henderson this betrayal of sympathetic interest, on the part of one ordinarily so reserved and indifferent, was of startling significance. As for Ogilvie, he only laughed.

"In my trade," said he, "we don't mind a few drops of water, whether salt or fresh."

"But when you are on shore, you should do as shore-folk do," she said; and thereupon she went and returned the cap to its peg. Henderson remembered afterwards that he had never seen her figure look so bewitchingly graceful as when she was holding the brass buttons up to the gaslight, the better to polish them and the glazed leather band.

No, it was not Jack Ogilvie, purser of the *Aros Castle*, who was the stranger; it was he, Allan Henderson, who found himself, or

imagined himself to be, a stranger. He felt himself isolated and companionless ; his poor little budget of news, so all-important to himself, neither asked for nor thought of ; all the talk was of the festivities in connection with the forthcoming visit of the Glasgow Choir. Jess, it is true, would occasionally try to say a word or two to him, or would proffer him the matches, or the like ; but he was proud and hurt ; it was in stern silence that he listened to all this babblement about dancing and partners and dress. Strangest thing of all, it was Barbara—Barbara the apathetic and morose—who was now most animated ; her liquid dark-blue eyes were full of life, her parted lips smiling, a pleased and eager interest giving a fresh bloom to her complexion.

“I am sure the waltz country-dance is as pretty as any,” she was saying.

“Yes, when you have plenty of good waltzers,” Ogilvie interposed, with a laugh.

“And the figure is so simple,” she continued, addressing him alone, “there is no difficulty in trying to remember. But the figures of the quadrille—and worse still, the figures of the Lancers—well, who can remember them ? ”

“Who?” he repeated, gaily. “Why, your partner, to be sure! That’s his business. You should be taken through a quadrille without a moment’s trouble; it’s for your partner to tell you what is coming next. That is the good fortune of being a young lady—everything is done for you—you have no bother. But I’m afraid that what is considered the best use of a dance in the great houses in London would not be practicable at the Drill Hall. A couple of partners wouldn’t find it easy to ‘sit out,’ and have a confidential chat by themselves—unless they went down the steps into the lane, and that would be awkward, among the mud, with perhaps an arriving carriage or two——”

“But surely Mr. McFadyen will see that everything is done in a proper way,” observed Mrs. Maclean, not quite understanding the point. “It would be a great pity if the young people were not allowed to enjoy themselves—it’s not so many chances they have in the course of a year.”

“Oh, yes, you may trust the councillor,” said Ogilvie, lightly. “All the financial questions have been confided to him; and the refreshment department as well; though

there will be nothing so grand as what the McAskills gave, for a hotel-keeper has a lot of servants, and knows how to do things."

"I am sure no one will be busier than yourself, Mr. Ogilvie," said Barbara, with approving eyes. "For I remember at the other dance you were looking after every one——"

"Busy?" said he. "But not too busy to remember promises; and you've promised me a dance, Miss Barbara; and maybe we'll make it into two or three. McFadyen is a desperate man for the dancing; he'll be glad enough to stay on; and you hurried away far too soon last time. This time we must treat you better; and you'll not be flying off just when the fun is going to begin."

"And you, now, Allan, my lad," put in the widow, with the most kindly intention, "are you not thinking of going with them? The life of a young man should not be altogether made up of books and classes."

The black look on Allan's face was blended now with an active displeasure.

"No, no," said he, impatiently. "Let them that can enjoy such amusements do so, and welcome: there's no blame to them."

But other folks have other ways—that is all.”

And thereupon he rose from his seat, to take his leave. The widow urged him to remain, but he refused, with stiff courtesy. Jess alone followed him into the front shop.

“What is it that has vexed you, Allan?” she asked, with direct frankness.

“There are some things in human nature that I do not understand yet,” he replied, and that dark and absent look on his face was as sombre as ever. “And perhaps I shall never be able to understand them. Good-night, Jessie!”

He held out his hand for a moment, and she pressed it. As he left, her gentle grey eyes followed him, and there was more than sympathetic concern in them. She did not at once return to the parlour.

Outside the rain was still falling heavily, and there was a cold wind blowing in from the sea. The schoolmaster was grateful for this stinging wet that struck about his ears; it seemed to bewilder him in some kind of way, and to repress and chill down the hot turmoil of his brain.

CHAPTER III.

A RAID ON THE SANCTUARY.

A BROODING twilight lay over the hills and the lonely corries as two men—the one of them being Lauchlan the shoemaker, the other his cousin Colin, a keeper from Loch-Awe side—made their way along the shores of a solitary and voiceless sea-loch. The keeper was a short person, of extraordinary breadth of shoulder and muscular development about the legs; he looked indeed like a compressed giant; and he walked with the long swinging stride of one used to the heather. Both men spoke in undertones, though that seemed unnecessary enough in this silent and trackless solitude.

“It is I,” said Lauchlan, gloomily, in Gaelic, “that am not liking this affair.”

“With your leave, then,” rejoined his

companion, in the same tongue, "you are a fool. Why, the doings of this night will be talked of throughout the West Highlands for years and years to come! And you yourself, Lauchlan," he went on, with a grim jocosity, "you yourself will be made famous, if names should leak out. As Lauchlan the shoemaker, you could never become famous; but as one that helped to drive the deer out of the Creannoch sanctuary, you will become famous. The poets will sing of you, Lauchlan——"

Lauchlan was peevish. He expressed an opinion about poets in general, and a wish as to their future fate, that betrayed his ill-temper.

"There was one of them," he continued, "living in Duntroone; and for two years I was mending boots and shoes for him; and he went away; and never a penny of his money was I seeing before or since. And if any names leak out, as you say, it will more likely put us into jail than anything else. That will be a fine thing, to be in jail!" He turned his head, as if suddenly remembering. "Is there a drop in the bottle, Colin?"

"Indeed there is," said the keeper, pausing

for a moment. "But there's more than a drop or two drops where we are going. Oh, I tell you, Lord Esme is the boy! He is the boy! If there's any devilment in the country, he must be at it; and fearing for nothing; the lion's heart the young man has got, and no mistake. Was I telling you what happened last year on the Strin, when the water was too low for the fishing?" continued the keeper, as they resumed their progress. "Well, now, if there's any kind of poaching that is not known to Lord Esme Carruthers, then I am not aware of it. And a fine trick he has, if the pools are low, and the salmon are hiding, and you cannot see them so as to drop the snatching-hooks over them; for he will bring a spaniel with him, and he will put the spaniel into the water, and fling stones here and there, with the spaniel swimming after them, and crossing every inch of the pool; and do you not think a salmon will imagine it is the devil overhead when he sees the four paws of a spaniel going like the paddles of a steamer?—he will be very glad to make a move of it——"

"I will take a little drop more, Colin; I am not used to such long travelling as you."

Again they halted, and again they resumed—each contentedly wiping his mouth with his coat-sleeve.

“Very well, then; at the time I am telling you of, we managed at length to get sight of a salmon, and Lord Esme he put the line over him, and struck, and sure enough we had him fast. ‘Here, Colin,’ says his lordship, ‘you play this fish, and I’ll gaff him for you;’ for he never cares about playing a fish, whether he has hooked him by fair means or any means. Then he takes the gaff down to the water’s edge; and I was standing over him—with no great strain on the fish either; when, by the holy piper, away comes the line into the air; and the first thing I saw was that the triangle had struck his lordship in the face. And maybe you do not know what a triangle is, Lauchlan, but it is three hooks, each as long as your finger, and they are bound back to back with a band of iron; and what do you think now—one of the hooks had gone right into Lord Esme’s cheek. If it had been an ordinary salmon-fly, I could have stripped the dressing off, and pushed the barb through, and got the hook out that way; but, bless me, there were the other two

hooks, and I could not break them off, or do anything with them. ‘Your lordship,’ says I, ‘you will have to go into Inverness, to get a doctor to cut it out.’ ‘You scoundrel,’ says he—but speaking was not easy for him, the poor young man—‘do you want me to advertise myself as a poacher all over the country, and me known to every station-master on the Highland Line? Take your knife in your hand now, and dig this thing out!’ And with that he lay down, and put his head on the heather. Lauchlan, my son, it was a terrible job. More than once have I had to cut a hook out of my own finger; but it was nothing at all to that job. And did he utter a word or a groan all the time?—not one!—not a movement of a muscle—and my handkerchief and his handkerchief smothered. And, do you know what he says when he is on his feet again, and I have the triangle out: ‘Well, Colin,’ he says, and he was laughing, ‘I do not think it is on this side of my head I will sleep to-night!’ Was not that a hero now? I tell you, Lord Esme is the boy!—he’s the boy for any devilment that’s going!”

“Ay, and are you sure he will be here this night?” asked Lauchie—whose undertones

had sunk almost to a whisper, for the darkness was coming on, and they were in a lonely neighbourhood.

“Sure I am of that,” his friend answered, “if Niall Gorach can find out the Black Bothy in Glen Etherick; and there are few things about this district unknown to the half-witted lad. ‘Colin, my old friend,’ says his lordship to me—and if there’s anyone can speak better Gaelic than Lord Esme, I am not acquainted with him—‘Colin,’ says he, ‘maybe that is a foolish tale of Niall Gorach about the white stag in Creannoch; but anyway you must get a few of your friends that you can trust, and we will go into the Forest, and we will drive out every living head of deer that’s in the sanctuary, and scatter them far and wide; and if there is any white stag there, he will soon be seen wandering about by somebody.’”

“Ay—when we are in jail,” murmured Lauchie, in sombre tones.

“I do not care,” said the telescoped giant, defiantly. “If his lordship came to me, and said, ‘Colin, we will go now and knock at the door of the Bad Place, and see what they will do to us,’ it’s I that would be answering him, ‘Very well, your lordship: where you

go I will be at your side.’ And maybe they would be quite civil to him after all; for there’s no one can withstand Lord Esme when he wishes to be merry and friendly—every one knows that.”

By this time they had got well away from the sea-loch, and were gradually ascending into a wild upland region that looked dreary enough in the gathering dark. An absolute silence prevailed in these mountain solitudes, save for the trickling of some unseen burn; and Lauchlan, laboriously toiling after his guide, was not disposed to waste his breath in speech. But at last he said discontentedly—

“Was there no easier way of getting to Glen Etherick than this way?”

“There are many ways of getting to Glen Etherick, as is well known,” responded Colin, with quiet dignity. “But when you will be planning an expedition of this kind, it must be done with judgment; and if all of us had gone together to the Black Bothy*, do you not think that every keeper within ten miles of the Creannoch Forest would have become aware of it? No, no, Lauchlan, my son; that is not the way we manage; for one will

* Black Bothy—an illicit still.

come from here, and another from there ; and the Black Bothy has been chosen as a trysting-place so that a small keg or two of whisky could be sent on beforehand. For I tell you that Lord Esme is the boy ; ay, that indeed ; and anyone that does him a service—well, he will not die of thirst.”

“It is I that am wishing we were there,” responded Lauchie, with a heartfelt sigh, as he plunged and stumbled and fought his way along through rocks and heather.

After protracted and weary toil they at length began to descend from these solitary heights, eventually getting into a deep and narrow ravine the sides of which were lined with birch trees that made their progress more and more difficult. And the darkness had grown profound.

“I am thinking this is the right corrie,” said the keeper, “but I am not sure. And maybe we will have to wait till the moon rises——”

At this moment he uttered a brief exclamation, and involuntarily stopped short. For a human figure had suddenly become visible, peering from among the birch trees. Then he recognised who this was.

“Son of the devil,” he growled angrily,

“ what do you mean by haunting the woods like a wild-cat? Well, where is the Black Bothy, then ? ”

“ It is lower down,” answered Niall Gorach ; but he did not wait for any more questions ; he vanished into the gloom again, not even the crackling of a twig betraying his whereabouts.

However, even without Niall Gorach’s guidance, the keeper and his companion experienced but little trouble in discovering the appointed rendezvous ; for when they had still further descended the chasm, a muffled sound of voices proved to be a sufficient clue ; and after crossing the waters of a small stream, they made their way to the entrance of the dismantled still. Indeed the half-dozen or so of shepherds, gillies, and the like who had taken possession of the Bothy did not appear to have aimed at much concealment ; they had lit a fire of chips and branches in the middle of the floor ; two or three candles, stuck in black bottles, also helped to light up the spacious cavern ; while the hilarious talking and laughing going on was quite unrestrained. Beyond the red glare of the fire, and seated on a log of wood, was a young man who was clearly king of

the company : a handsome young fellow, with a devil-may-care air about him, and a merry twinkle in his eye. He alone of the group had neither cup nor glass by him ; he hardly even cared to keep his pipe alit, as he listened, with evident diversion, to the clamorous argument going forward, in which gibes and jests and sarcasms were being freely exchanged.

“Welcome to the hearth !” he called out, in excellent Gaelic, when he caught a glimpse of the two dusky figures at the door. “Come away in, Colin, and you Lauchlan ; and make yourselves at home ; for we will not start till the moon is up. And pass the keg now, lads ; Colin, a seat on the floor is better than no seat ; and when you have been in the night air, John Barleycorn is a good friend.”

“I am drinking,” rejoined the keeper, slowly and formally, as he filled his leathern cup, “I am drinking to your lordship, and to the finding of the white stag.”

The young man burst out laughing.

“We will say nothing about the white stag,” said he, “for fear the half-witted lad may have been making fools of us. But this I know that it will be a fine thing to send the Creannoch deer on their travels. People

who go on their travels see many wonders ; and it is not good to have either deer or men shut up in a sanctuary ; we will give the Creannoch stags an opportunity of beholding the world. But in the meantime, lads of my heart, send round that keg ; and I will give you another toast now—‘ The land of hills and glens and heroes ! ’ ”

He himself did not drink ; but the others did, with a will ; they were all talking vociferously, and laughing, and arguing ; they had been well primed for this enterprise.

“ And now for a song ! ” his young lordship called aloud, to still the tumult. “ The sons of the Gael must have their bard with them. Who is it, Colin—is it your friend of the shoes ? ”

“ Yes, yes, indeed ! ” they all of them cried—rejoiced to find a scape goat.

And Lauchlan, staring with bemused eyes into the red-flickering flames, had no thought of declining the honour. As soon as he comprehended that a song was required of him, he began. It was a mournful song ; and in slow and melancholy tones he sang—his gaze absently fixed on the glowing embers—

‘The wind is fair, the day is fine,
Swiftly, swiftly runs the time;
The boat is floating on the tide
That wafts me off from Fiunary.’

Then all of them caught at the chorus—for there is no strain in all the West Highlands so well-known as the Farewell to Fiunary—

‘*Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Mo shoraidh slan le Fionn-Airidh !*’

Lauchlan was near crying through this universal sympathy; and it was with a still more plaintive pathos that he proceeded—

‘A thousand thousand tender ties
Accept this day my plaintive sighs;
My heart within me almost dies
At thought of leaving Fiunary.’

And again the hoarse wail of the chorus rewarded him—

‘*Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Eirich agus tiugainn O,
Mo shoraidh slan le Fionn-Airidh !*’

But there was a young gillie present, who was either drunk, or envious, or jocular, or perhaps all three combined, for he interposed spitefully—

“That is very well sung for a wintering sheep.”

Now, Lauchlan MacIntyre, as everyone knew, was a native of Lismore; and Lismore is an island to which sheep from the higher districts are sent for the winter; and, for some occult reason or another, the most deadly insult that can be paid to a Lismore man is to say, “Meh-h-h” to him, or to ask him the question, “How are you now, you wintering sheep?” In the present case, when it dawned upon Lauchie’s understanding that this atrocious epithet had been bestowed on him, he ceased his song. He regarded the facetious young gillie. He looked around. There was no weapon of any kind at hand. But with a sudden inspiration he whipped off one of his heavy-nailed shoes; he poised it only for an instant; he hurled it across the fire at the face of his enemy. Nor had the jocose young gillie been expecting any such attack; he had no time to ward off the blow; his nose received the missile; and before he could stagger up to his feet he was a sad spectacle. And in fact he was not allowed to get to his feet; they pinned him down; and by the time they had threatened, and expostulated, and

curbed the raging wild beast within him, the signal had come for them to start, Niall Gorach having appeared at the Bothy, with the announcement that the moon was over the hill.

And very soon, after leaving the secret haunt that the gaugers had discovered and harried, they entered upon a much more desolate country than any they had come through. A ghostly country, moreover; for now the moon was up; and a pale and spectral light shone along the treeless wastes and showed peak after peak of mountains receding into the wan and cloudless skies. Of course there were shadowy hollows here and there; and it was along by them, for the most part, that they stealthily made their way; but on the whole their progress was steadily upwards, into far-reaching and sterile altitudes that were plunged in profoundest silence.

“Now, you will remember, Lauchie,” said Colin the keeper—whose gait was a little uncertain, though he managed to get over the ground—“you will remember, when you are left by yourself, not to be too eager. It will be enough if the deer get our wind; and maybe they will pass out by his

lordship—though I am not believing much in the white stag; anyway the driving of the Sanctuary will be a noble frolic——”

“Aw, Dyeea,” said Lauchie, who was giggling and chuckling to himself, “the Rechabites are the clever boys; but the Rechabites have many things to learn; it is little they know of a sport like this. There is no sport in the drinking of water; and that is the truth I am telling you, Colin, my hero. What is the use of water—and be —— to it! Lord Esme is the lad! Colin, lend me your cup.”

For on leaving the Bothy the black bottles that had served as candle-sticks had been filled from the kegs; and Lauchie had become possessed of one of them; so that he was now enabled to give his friend and companion a stalwart dram. In return Colin would have repeated his instructions about the driving of the Sanctuary; but his speech was rather thick and involved; while Lauchlan was far too happy to pay any heed to him. Lauchlan was singing little songs to himself; and laughing; and making merry at the expense of the Rechabites. He had no quarrel with any deer; he had no concern about any white stag; the two moons

that lit up this ghostly world shed a gentle and friendly radiance around ; and the black bottle sticking out of his breast pocket comforted his heart with pleasurable anticipations.

“Aw, Dyeea, the Rechabites are the clever boys,” he kept repeating to himself, with unholy glee, “and it is I that would like to see the whole of the Tent No. 3182 here at this moment, and every man of them with a black bottle in his hand. That would be a new kind of dance for them—the clever boys that they are !”

By this time the marauders were well within the Creannoch Forest, and approaching the Sanctuary—a vast hollow formed by the concave sides of two adjoining mountains ; and it was at this point that the straggling little band began to separate. Here, also, Long Lauchie received his orders. He was not to stir from his post for at least an hour ; then he was to go gently and slowly in the direction of the Sanctuary, down wind. There was to be no calling or signalling of any kind ; indeed, the probability was that he would not again see any of his companions until he might chance to meet them in Duntroone. His own way back thither was left to his own discretion.

And so Lauchlan sate down on the heather, and let the others go ; and ere long he was quite alone in this phantom world of rock and peak and grey moonlight. He did not listen anxiously for the swift patter of hoofs, nor watch for the startled upraising of an antlered head ; he was content with himself and his own company ; he was carefully nursing the black bottle ; he was crooning to himself the *Leis an Lurgainn*’—

*‘Islay looming, o hee,
In the gloaming, o ho,
Our ship’s compass set we,
And our lights we did show ;’*

the two or three moons over there in the south, as they looked down upon him, were of a friendly aspect ; and his heart, jogging on warmly and equably, was at peace with all mankind.

* * * * *

When Lauchlan MacIntyre awoke, the dawn was declaring itself, and he looked around with dazed eyes wondering. For this world in which he found himself was in no wise or seeming the world with which he was familiar ; he recognised no feature of it, nor the conditions of it. Had he been translated, then ? Was this the new heaven

and the new earth of which he had vaguely heard in slumberous discourses? But there was no living creature visible; there was the strangest silence; and a thin rain, almost imperceptible in its fineness, had become glorified by the early sunlight, and hung between him and the east as if it were some magic silver veil, hiding him from the knowledge of mortals. And there were other perplexing things. If he had been spirited away into fairy-land, what had become of his shoe? One foot had shoe and stocking; the other its stocking only; and a continuous hot throb seemed to say that in his unknown passage from the inhabited regions of the universe his toes must seriously have encountered stones. And the black bottle—alas! it was empty—the black bottle appeared to be connected with transactions which he could not in the least remember. Then he looked round once more—this poor orphan unit of humanity transferred to an inhospitable sphere that did not even offer him a cup of water wherewith to slake his thirst. And then he put his head on the heather, and fell peacefully asleep again; the rain might rain as it liked.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INFORMER.

THE rumour ran through Duntroone that some accident—some slight accident—had happened to the *Aros Castle*; certain it is that instead of continuing her voyage as usual, she had slowly steamed back, and was now lying alongside the quay. And Barbara, as soon as the mid-day meal was over, and herself more or less set at liberty, put on her things quickly and went out, no doubt wishing to hear the latest news.

But she had not gone a dozen yards when she saw in the distance none other than Jack Ogilvie himself; he was coming along in his usual leisurely fashion, smoking his pipe. She instantly paused. She glanced across towards the tobacconist's shop, to see if there

was any one at the door. Then she retreated into the entry from which she had just emerged ; and there she remained, hiding herself in the dusk, until she knew that Ogilvie must have passed and be well on his way, wherever that might be leading him. And then she came out again ; and, with another nervous glance across the street, she proceeded to follow in the direction he had taken, and that with an idle and indifferent air, as though she were merely going for a haphazard stroll.

There was no need for her to quicken her pace ; she knew that any one leaving Duntroone by this road must necessarily return by it, the pathway round the shore being blocked ; and so she had ample time to arrange her cuffs and smooth her hair—and also to summon up some trifle of courage, in view of a possible meeting. Nevertheless when her anxious eyes discovered for her that Jack Ogilvie had taken advantage of a wayside seat to rest for a few seconds in order to fill his pipe, her heart began beating in a painful fashion, and once or twice she hesitated, as if afraid to go further. Then she went on more boldly, looking at the brushwood, and at the mossgrown wall, and

at the deep hollow with its cottages and gardens, as if her attention were wholly occupied by these.

She drew near. He did not look up. She came abreast of him—irresolute—her eyes conscious of his every movement and attitude, yet pretending to be fixed far ahead. And then something—perhaps the passing of her skirts—attracted his notice; there was an upward glance; the next instant he was on his feet.

“Oh, how do you do, Miss Barbara?” he said, in his ready and pleasant fashion.

Her face was afire as she timidly gave him her hand. If she had been sure that she could safely address him in Gaelic, perhaps she would have been less embarrassed.

“I hear there was an accident to the *Aros Castle*,” she managed to say, in her confusion; “I hope there was no one hurt.”

“Oh, no; not at all,” he answered her, lightly. “Very little of an accident—leaking steam-tubes, or something of that kind. But I may have a day or two’s holiday; and, of course, getting so much of the salt water ordinarily, it is but natural I should turn landward when I have an hour for a stroll. And which way were you going, Miss

Barbara?" he continued, in the same free-and-easy manner. "Towards Cowal, perhaps?"

"Yes; I was thinking——" she said; and there she stopped. She seemed frightened; for the next word on either side might involve a suggestion that they should walk on together. Her shyness and alarm were equally unperceived by the Purser.

"Well, I had some half idea of going there myself," he said, cheerfully. "And two's company, and one's none—if you don't mind."

He appeared to take her acquiescence for granted; for without more ado he placed himself by her side, and they proceeded on their way: she trembling, breathless, overjoyed, he rather glad that, as he was sauntering towards Cowal Ferry anyway, he had encountered a very pretty girl who could walk and chat with him.

And then, as in duty bound, he began to ask after the health of her aunt; and he would most likely have spoken of Jess; and perhaps expressed a hope that the tobacconist business continued to flourish; but Barbara would have none of these petty and commonplace details; she hastily brushed them aside; she wanted to know all about the forthcoming ball to be given to the Glasgow Gaelic Choir;

she asked him, rather nervously, how he proposed to secure any dances for himself, if he had to act as Master of the Ceremonies ; and then, with a certain coyness, she supposed that on so great an occasion he would have no time to come and speak to his friends. Well, if that was her cue, he was willing enough to respond ; it mattered little to him what the conversation was about. And thus it was that visions of festivities began to form themselves before Barbara's eyes ; and there were melodious strains, and the continuous whisper of swift-gliding feet ; her brain became exalted with the excitement of brilliant lights and fine dresses and the kaleidoscopic groupings of colour. And it was the hero and chief figure of that gay world who was beside her ; who was devoting himself to her entertainment ; who had pretty plainly intimated that on the eventful evening in question she and her immediate companions were not likely to be neglected.

By this time they were well away from the little town, and out in the silence of the country—a silence so hushed and still that the crunching of cartwheels on the road could be heard at a surprising distance. It was an ideal day for a lovers' ramble—an

April day so fine and rare and clear that it seemed as if summer had already taken possession of the land; the heavens a dome of fleckless sapphire; the slopes of heather and pasture basking and breeding in the grateful warmth; far away beyond the waters of Loch Linnhe the long range of mountains become etherealised and dream-like—the mountains of Kingairloch, of Morven, of ‘Muile nam mor-bheann,’ Mull of the great hills. And then they came in sight of the lower end of Lismore, and the lighthouse, and the entrance to the Sound.

“That is a beautiful way your steamer goes,” said she, “and I am sure you must be pleased to be on so fine a boat.”

“I’m sick-tired of the whole thing,” he answered her, bluntly. And then, seeing that she looked startled, he went on: “I’m sick-tired of looking after the landing of herring-boxes, and collecting ninepences and eighteenpences from half-drunk drovers. And as for any position or consideration: now and again a shore acquaintance will come up and pretend to be friendly, expecting me to let him off for half-fare; and the laird’s wife, when she comes along the gangway, may toss me a civil word, if she thinks I can help

her with her luggage ; but the daughters—the young ladies—oh, dear, no !—if they take any notice of me at all, they stare at me as they would stare at a policeman. But look at the purser on one of the Australian liners, for example : there's a position now—there's consideration : maybe two or three hundred first-class passengers on board, and the purser of far more consequence to them than the captain—getting up dances and entertainments for them, and taking a chief part—and every evening at the head of his own table in the saloon, in dress uniform, with his particular friends dining along with him. That is something ; that is not like landing herring-boxes, or getting the passengers out of the way to have half-a-dozen stirks driven on board. Yes, indeed, I'm sick-tired of it—whatever the tourists and people of that sort may say about the beautiful mountains and the islands. Give me a chance, and I tell you I'm off ! ”

“ Are you—are you wishing to go away from here altogether ! ” she said—with the strangest look on her face.

Probably he did not notice. He answered her with much equanimity—

“ Give me the chance, as I say. There's

more fun and frolic in foreign parts—and more to see——”

“But—but one should be fondest of one’s own country,” she said, rather faintly.

“Oh, yes,” he replied, “when one’s own country finds one a good berth. But the fact is that the purserships of the Australian liners don’t grow on blackberry bushes; and in the meantime, Miss Barbara, I’ve just to put up with what I’ve got, as best I can.”

And so, with varied discourse—quite unconcerned on his part, on hers more strained and nervously anxious—they continued on their way, and eventually reached Cowal Ferry, which was the goal of their fortuitous excursion. But at this point there is a solitary little inn, overlooking the low-murmuring rapids of the sea-loch; and it occurred to Jack Ogilvie that he ought not to let his companion set out on the return journey without offering her some slight refreshment.

“Will you not step inside,” said he, in his offhand fashion, “and sit down for a few minutes, and have a cup of tea, or a glass of milk, or something of the kind? It’s a good long way back—and the afternoon is drawing on.”

She hesitated, but only for a moment. Being with him, walking with him, was the astounding and bewildering thing: to go into a room and sit down seemed nothing different from that, nothing more remarkable. So quite obediently she followed him into the narrow passage; and when he opened the door of an apartment that was clearly intended for the public—for there were tea-things on the table, and scones, and marmalade, and the like—she went in there too, and took a modest seat. As for him, he made himself entirely at home. He rang the bell, and ordered tea. Then he turned to examine the pictures—mostly chromo-lithographs of German origin. He brought her the surprising and miraculous ornaments from the mantel-piece, and he was laughing at the snow-white poodles and the whiskered pards. And again, when the simple repast was placed before them, he drew in a chair for her, and seated himself at the head of the table, and proceeded to help her, with an amiable solicitude. It was all like a dream to Barbara. She hardly knew how she had come hither. The scones were scones of magic—when the sun-god himself was laughing and talking to her.

In the midst of all this the door was opened and there appeared—Long Lauchie the shoemaker. Lauchlan was in a genial mood; he did not stay to apologise for any intrusion; he shut the door behind him, and advanced to the table, and pulled in a chair.

“Aw, it’s a fine thing to come among friends,” he said; and he was smiling with a vague benignity, “and I was seeing you in the distance, before you came near the house. Ay, if it had not been for friends and for a friendly glass here or there, where would I be now? Aw, Dyeea, I thought I was never to be back in a Christian country again!—and if it had not been for the farmer at the head of Glen Sharay—well, I will pay him that bottle back as sure as I am a living man.” He stopped, and regarded the Purser with a look of mysterious significance. “Now, Mr. Ogilvie, was you hearing any news?”

“News? What news?” inquired Ogilvie, who bore the interruption quite good-humouredly.

“Ay, was you hearing any news?” he repeated.

“News?—news about what?” said the Purser.

“Aw, well, there might be news about many things—and maybe about deer,” Lauchlan said, evasively, and there was a dark merriment in his eyes. “I am not saying anything, but maybe there might be news——”

Here the young servant lass came in, and Lauchlan’s face at once became solemn and impenetrable. But when she had placed the whisky and the tumbler before him, and departed, he burst into a fit of soft and happy laughter.

“Aw, yes, indeed, there may be news in a day or two,” he went on, and clearly he was chuckling over this secret that he would not reveal. “But I was not saying anything to any one—how could I, when there was no one from one glen to the next, and from one hill to the next?—as sure as death you would not believe that the country is such a wide country, with roads leading to no place at ahl. And if it had not been for the farmer at Glen Sharay—he’s the man for me—with many and many’s the good song, sitting at the table ahl the night through—and a parting glass at the door in the morning——”

“Well, Mr. MacIntyre,” said the Purser,

pleasantly, "you seem to have met with some adventures; but what in heaven's name is that kind of shoe you're wearing?"

Lauchlan looked down at his left foot, which was encased in an old battered shoe of portentous dimensions, with straws sticking out at the top.

"That was the farmer too," said he, vaguely. "He lent it to me—and it was rayther large—and we put some straw into it——"

"Yes, but what has become of your own shoe?" was the next and natural question.

"I am not remembering," said Lauchlan, with a kind of abstracted look in his eyes. "I am not remembering, just at the moment. Maybe I gave it to a beggar, poor man."

It was Barbara who now interposed to say it was time for them to go, and Ogilvie at once acceded; but Lauchlan MacIntyre wanted to finish his liquor in peace; so they were well content to leave him. And as these two now walked away into Duntroone, the rosy evening shone along the blood-red leafless heather; and the withered pasture-slopes, not yet answering to the summons of the spring, burned a warm gold. But if the world around them seemed all aflame, the

heavens above them were of a pure and pale lilac hue, with not even a fleck of cloud visible anywhere. The silence had grown still more profound with the dying down of the day ; and all the birds were mute, save for one solitary thrush, on some distant bough, that kept charming his mate with his clear and silvery trills. Twilight was around them as they entered the small town ; and here and there a golden star appeared among the rigging in the harbour. When Barbara got upstairs to the semi-darkness of her own room, she sat down without taking off any of her finery : the gates of wonderland had just been closed, it is true, but the glory and glamour were still before her dazzled eyes.

On this same evening the schoolmaster was seated in Mrs. Maclean's parlour, and he was in an unusually cheerful mood. He was endeavouring to show, as he placidly smoked his pipe, and watched Jessie's nimble fingers busy with her needle ; the little widow attending to the shop when necessary—he was endeavouring to show that the world was progressively and surely becoming wiser, this happy result being brought about by the gradual and inevitable elimination of fools. The fools having become extinct, must not

the residue of mankind enjoy a larger average of wisdom? And then he began to enumerate the various classes and sections and subsections of fools who were by degrees extinguishing themselves out of the universe. There were, for example, the people who went with a lighted candle to discover the origin of an escape of gas; undoubtedly they were removing themselves from amongst us. And there were the people who made fast the main-sheet of a sailing-boat. And there were the people who ate tinned lobster. And the people who got into or out of a train in motion. And the people who made parachute descents, who performed with wild beasts, who dived from bridges, and the like.

“And the people who muddle their brains with whisky,” he added, in an undertone, as the tall form of the shoemaker appeared at the half-opened door.

But Long Lauchlan did not overhear this remark; if he had overheard it, he probably would have taken no notice; he was in a benignant mood. For he had been wandering along from one crony's house to another, rejoiced to be back again in human society, and nursing the secret and blissful consciousness of having been engaged in an

exploit that would soon be the talk and astonishment of all the West Highlands. And when he had established himself among this further group of friends, he was as darkly mysterious as ever ; but very happy.

“It is a great thing,” he was saying complacently (with one foot hidden beneath his chair), “it is a great thing to be meeting with adventures. Here have I been out of the world for two days and more—ay, maybe three days, but I am not so sure, for it was a wild country. And it’s not so long since I went through to Fort William, and made the red-headed carpenter flee like a hare—aw, Dyeea, you should have seen him run down the street as if the duvvle was after him ; and not long before that again I was at the bringing of you home, Mr. Henderson, from among the rocks ; and not long before that was the wreck of the *Sanda*, ay, and the funeral of Knockalanish, and the coming away with Miss Barbara. And I’m sure I could scarce believe my eyes when I sah her this evening—her and Ogilvie just like lad and lass—as they were drawing near to Cowal Ferry ; and then afterwards the two of them sitting very comfortable-like in the parlour of the inn——”

“Lauchlan MacIntyre, what are you talking about?” the widow broke in, angrily. “Are you hawering? Are you out of your senses? Barbara—in the inn at Cowal Ferry——?”

Thus unexpectedly and sharply challenged, the shoemaker was constrained to make good his veracity; he had to give details; he insisted on the truth of his story; while Jess Maclean became more and more indignant.

“Mr. MacIntyre, you have been asleep and dreaming!” she exclaimed. “Barbara sitting in the inn-parlour with Ogilvie the Purser?—you never saw any such thing, that I know! Barbara had plenty to do about the house this afternoon: she could not have gone out—to Cowal or anywhere else——”

But the shoemaker was obdurate.

“Very well, then,” said Jess, promptly, “I will go over this very minute, and see Barbara—I will hear from herself.”

And therewith she rose, and flung a shawl round her shoulders, and passed through the front shop.

Meanwhile, amid all this insistence and indignant denial, Allan Henderson had remained sternly silent, the hard-lined ascetic

face perhaps a trifle greyer than usual. And now that Jess had gone, he paid no heed to the others ; he seemed to listen with a morbid intensity for her return ; his gaze was fixed furtively but unswervingly on the door.

Jess Maclean was absent for only a few minutes. When she came back into the room, she turned to Long Lauchie ; her eyes were averted ; she dared not look in Allan's direction.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. MacIntyre," said she, humbly, and with the most painful embarrassment, "you were quite right. Barbara was at Cowal Ferry this evening—and—and I suppose she met Ogilvie by accident."

And then the schoolmaster knew his doom.

CHAPTER V.

AT AN OPEN DOOR.

AND yet he would know it from herself. On the following afternoon, as soon as his school-work was over, he left the dull grey building and at once and hurriedly walked along to the house in Campbell Street. It was a wild and stormy evening; and wild and stormy were the conflicting passions that strove for mastery in his heart—black hate and jealousy of the man who had entrapped an innocent girl into these clandestine relations—a stung pride that even now prompted him to turn, and go back home, and have done with her for ever—and then again a sort of desperate hope that all might yet be well, that some explanation would be forthcoming, that the beautiful eyes might still have a friendly look for him. This way and that surged

these emotions and fancies—perhaps with the darker predominating. For she had allowed him to believe that he might win her for his wife; and she had listened to his schemes, in which she was supposed to have a personal interest; and if, while thus giving him tacit encouragement, she was holding secret communication with that other? When Allan Henderson proceeded up the narrow stairway and knocked at the door, his brows were sombre enough; and he was steeling himself to indignation and reproach.

The girl Christina admitted him, and, in answer to his question, showed him into the parlour, where he found Barbara alone, engaged in needle-work. On his entering, she looked up startled, and even apprehensive, for he had never called in this fashion before; but at all events she rose to bid him welcome; and then she civilly asked him to take a chair. Her manner was cold and reserved; she seemed to be on her guard; it was for him to speak.

But whither had fled all the anger and reprobation with which he had come armed? The mere sight of her had dispelled all that; the touch of her hand had thrilled him strangely; and now that she had returned to

her work—now that he could with impunity regard the modestly lowered lashes, the fresh and sweet complexion, the graceful outline of forehead and cheek and throat—in place of any wrathful upbraiding there was only an irresistible longing to possess and defend. She was a solitary creature—untaught in the ways of the world—she wanted someone to protect her from harm. And then, and above all, she was so maddeningly beautiful that his heart seemed to suffocate within him: it was he, not she, who was stunned and bewildered by this sudden juxtaposition.

“That is a very pretty dress,” said he—as the outcome of all his tumultuous wrongs!

“I am altering it a little,” she answered, without raising her eyes.

There was a moment or two of silence.

“It is clever of you to be able to do that for yourself,” he observed, anxious to propitiate.

“I have been used to it all my life,” she made answer. “My mother was ill two or three years before she died; and I had to do everything.”

And now she had recovered somewhat from her vague apprehension, and was inclined to be a little more friendly. He had no

reproaches to make, then? It was only a visit from a sweetheart, or one wishing to be a sweetheart?—and that any girl could take only as a compliment.

“I suppose there was not much fine dress-making at Kilree?” he remarked again.

“We could not have afforded it in any case,” she replied. “And indeed I am rather frightened about what I am doing now; for this is the dress I am to wear on the evening of the Glasgow Choir being here.”

It was an unintentional shaft, but it struck deep. For that was the evening the Purser had talked so much of; and Barbara would be there—attracting attention, no doubt, if not by this costume she was now working at, then at least by the symmetry of her figure and the elegance of her gait. He was almost driven to ask her whether she thought it seemly to go to a dance within a certain number of months of her father’s funeral; but he forbore: he would not quarrel with her; it was so wonderful to find her in some small measure gracious.

“Have you been over the way?” she went on. “I heard from Jessie that you looked in yesterday.”

And this also was unlucky: it re-awoke

his jealous tortures of the previous afternoon. He could no longer be silent.

“It was then,” he said, in measured tones—and he watched her—“it was then I was told of your having been at Cowal Ferry with Ogilvie the purser.”

She flushed hotly, but she replied with some touch of disdain—

“Yes, they make a great deal of that, for a small matter.”

“That is no small matter,” said he, slowly and seriously, “that may affect a girl’s good name.”

At this she fired up—her cheeks still crimson.

“And who says anything against my good name?” she demanded.

His breath came and went; he did not know what to say—whether to let the darker passions in his heart have utterance—or whether it was still possible to forget and forgive, on account of the beauty of her raven hair, her liquid eyes, and the splendid lines of her throat.

“For myself I care little what Ogilvie’s character may be,” said he, stiffly and ominously; “but a young girl would look better after her reputation who did not

happen to be found with him in a wayside public-house."

She raised her head quickly; her eyes were merciless; her lips were pale.

"As for my reputation," she said—hesitating a little in her excitement to find proper expression in English, "I am glad—it is not in the hands of such friends as you!"

"Barbara!" he exclaimed—as if she had struck him.

But she was passionate also.

"And as for Mr. Ogilvie," she continued, in the same taunting and angry fashion, "if you have anything to say against him, why do you not say it to himself? Why do you come to me with the story?—and suspecting harm where there is no harm. I do not wish for any more friends of that kind. Is it a great thing to have a cup of tea at Cowal Ferry?—well, that is my business, and not the business of anyone else: and I will look after my own good name, and no thanks to anyone—no thanks to my friends! And if you have any complaint against Mr. Ogilvie, I think you would do better to go to himself; and maybe he will have his answer for you——"

Henderson rose to his feet, his dark eyes aflame, his cheeks ashen-grey.

"There you have spoken a true word, Barbara," said he—though the effort of speech appeared almost to stifle him. "It is with Ogilvie I will deal. With you I have no quarrel. If he is trying to take advantage of your ignorance, I will settle scores with him. He knows, if you do not know. I will ask him a question, and I will make him answer——"

Again she looked up quickly: there was something in the expression of his face that caused her alarm.

"What—what will you do?"

"Well, with you I have no quarrel," was his only reply. "At any rate you and I can part as friends."

But at this her eyes fell again, and she would take no notice of his extended hand.

"I am friends with my friends," said she, sullenly, "and not with others."

He stood for a moment, irresolute, gazing at her; then he abruptly turned on his heel—his brows black and drawn together, his under-jaw stern almost to savageness; and in another couple of seconds he had quitted the house.

* * * * *

On the morning of the day on which the members of the Glasgow Gaelic Choir were to be entertained by their Highland comrades, Mr. McFadyen walked along to the railway-station. The hush of noon had fallen over the place; there were no trains either arriving or departing; and when the town-councillor stepped into the station-master's office, Mr. Gilmour looked up from his work as if interruption were welcome.

"Can ye spare me a few minutes, James?" the visitor inquired.

"Directly—in a second," answered the station-master. He signed the document he had been scanning, and returned it to the messenger who was standing by. Then he rose from his desk. "Now I'm with you, Peter," he said, blithely.

"I want you to come along to the house—there's something I would like your advice about," said Peter, with quite unusual shyness.

The good-natured station-master at once assented; he took down his cap; and presently the two friends were outside and making round by the harbour.

"I say, Jamie," observed the councillor, with an assumption of indifference, "What

do you think, now, of the Highland dress for showing off the figure ? ”

“That depends on the figure, I would say,” responded the station-master, bluntly.

“A fine answer !” said Mr. McFadyen, with scorn. “Cannot ye understand what I mean ? I mean the Highland dress as compared with any other dress——”

“Are you going to sport the kilt, Peter—is that what you’re aiming at ?” cried the station-master. “Are you going to make a chieftain of yourself ? Are you going to wear two feathers in your cap ? Or three, and make yourself a chief ? Dod, ye might as well be a chief as a chieftain, when it’s only an imaginary clan you’ve got at your back. For who ever heard of the clan McFadyen ?”

“Who ever heard of the clan Gilmour ?” retorted the councillor, angrily.

“There you’re out of it,” said the tall thin man with the bright red hair. “There you’re out of it, Peter, my friend,” he repeated, in saturnine triumph. “For at least my name is Highland. ‘Gilmour’—‘Gillie-mor’—the big young man. But McFadyen—McFadyen !—who on God’s earth could ever find out the meaning of a name like

that? And maybe you'll be for saying next that there's a McFadyen tartan!"

"Oh, yes, you're very clever!" remarked the councillor, peevishly. "Do you know what they say about people that are as clever as you?—they say 'You're so clever you could steal the eggs from under a heron, with her two eyes watching you.' But although you're so mighty clever, Mr. Jamie, perhaps you don't know that there are three tartans, the clan tartan, the hunting tartan, and the dress tartan; and when it comes to the dress tartan, you can choose for yourself——"

"Peter," said Gilmour, with a cackle of irreverent laughter. "I would give my best pair of breeks to see ye going through the town rigged out in the royal Stewart!"

"Indeed!" said Peter, contemptuously. "But if you were still a little more clever, you would understand that people do not go about the streets in a dress tartan."

Nevertheless, when they reached the councillor's house, this tone of acerbity could not be maintained; for Peter was seriously anxious for advice, and perhaps even hoping for sympathetic approval; and so, when he had ushered the station-master into his

principal room, he said, in a more amicable fashion—

“I’ll tell ye the truth, Jamie. There’s the entertainment to the Glasgow Choir this evening, and the dance, and all the rest of it; and I was saying to myself that that young spark of an Ogilvie was giving himself too many airs with his swallow-tail coat and his studs and the like. I’ve a coat of that kind myself, that I got about a dizzen years ago for the deputation to Glasgow; but I was trying it on the other day, and it made me look fearfu’ like a Free Kirk minister on a platform. And then says I to myself, ‘Well, there’s other ways o’ taking the shine out of that young sprig——’” He paused. “They came home last night,” he resumed, rather timidly glancing towards his friend. “Man, I wish ye would tell me whether you think they’ll do——”

“Let’s have a look at them, then!” said Gilmour.

Thereupon Mr. McFadyen left the room, returning shortly with a number of parcels, which he opened and displayed on the table. Everything was here to make up a correct Highland costume—cap, doublet, vest, kilt, sporran, hose, and shoes; while dirk and

sgean-dubh were brave with cairngorms and silver.

"But put them on, man!" the station-master remonstrated. "Go away and put them on, and let's see how ye look!"

"I'm not sure whether the dirk and the sgean-dubh should be worn at such a gathering," said the councillor, with some diffidence.

"Oh, go away and get the things on!" his friend said, impatiently. "I want to see if ye look at home in them."

Well, when Mr. McFadyen, after a good ten minutes' absence, reappeared at the door of the parlour, he certainly did not look at home in this resplendent costume; for he was extremely embarrassed, and anxious, and self-conscious; but all the same the station-master had not the heart to criticise, much less to smile. It was so abnormal to find Peter—the self-confident, self-assertive Peter—in this sensitive and almost supplicatory mood that out of mere compassion and to encourage him Gilmour said he thought the general effect was just first-rate. Peter was immensely relieved.

"You've got to get accustomed to it, of course," said he. "Naturally, you've got to get accustomed to it. And what's more,

you've got to get used to people looking at you."

"Man, you'll cut a dash at the Highland Games!" continued Gilmour, with friendly approval. "It suits ye, Peter—I tell ye it suits ye."

And now Mr. McFadyen, still further flattered and puffed up, was determined to show that he was not afraid to challenge alien scrutiny. He rang the bell. Presently there appeared the maidservant Sarah, a great, big, stupid-looking, porridge-fed, rubicund lass, with staring blue eyes.

"Sarah——" said her master, with lofty unconcern.

"Yes, sir."

"Ye'll go along to Mr. Dunbar——"

"Yes, sir."

"And tell him——"

"Yes, sir."

The fact is, the tall lass was saying "Yes, sir," quite incoherently, and without in the least listening to the message that was being delivered to her—so wholly engrossed was she by the startling spectacle that her master now presented.

"——And tell him to have a machine here to-night at a quarter to eight. A

quarter to eight—do ye hear me?—not a minute later, for I have to call for some friends before going on to the concert——”

“Yes, sir,” said Sarah, her eyes all-devouring.

“Go away, then,” said her master, sharply, “and mind : not a minute after a quarter to eight.”

She made a sudden jerky effort to retire—apparently overcome by some extraordinary emotion ; she succeeded in getting the door between her and the two men ; and then, the moment it was shut, they heard in the passage a tremendous explosion of long-suppressed, incontrollable, half-choked giggling. The infection was irresistible. In spite of himself the station-master burst into a wild guffaw of laughter ; he roared and roared ; he could not stop—though his face was purple with shame ; his long, angular carcase was shaken by the violence of this ungovernable merriment, and he struck his knees with his fists.

“I beg your pardon, Peter,” he gasped—with tears running down his cheeks. “I did not intend it—upon my soul. I did not intend it—it was that daft lass—I’m sure she’s half-witted—” And here he set to

roaring and laughing again. "That daft idiot of a lass!—what on earth did she break out like that for—a giggling idiot!—I see nothing myself to laugh at—except—except that she's just a downright born idiot!"

"Ay, and idiotcy seems to be catching," said Mr. McFadyen, who had preserved a calm dignity as the best answer to this disgraceful ebullition.

"Well, I must be going," the penitent station-master said, as he glanced at his watch and rose. "Never you mind, Peter: I think you look fine in the tartan—and—and I'm sure I beg your pardon for a bit friendly laugh."

"You're welcome—you're welcome," said the councillor, with much state; and ceremoniously and stiffly he conducted the station-master to the door, and bade him good-day.

But all that afternoon Peter McFadyen was tormented by a thousand vacillating decisions and arguments and fears. He could not attend to his business; he would leave his office, and run upstairs to his bedroom, and contemplate that distracting, tempting, dreaded costume. Then, as the hour arrived at which he had perforce to dress one way or another for the concert, he

grew desperate. Was he to be deterred by the imbecile hilarity of a turnip-headed scullery wench? The Highland garb was no novelty in Duntroone; why should he shrink from observant eyes? And at last, in a fit of morose anger, the result of his reflections over human vacuity and buffoonery, he deliberately arrayed himself in the tartan; and punctually at a quarter to eight he descended, got into the 'machine,' and set out for Campbell Street. On this occasion the big, porridgy servant-lass exercised a little more self-control; and her master drove away with something of a lighter heart.

But as he was ascending the stair towards the widow's rooms, his courage once more oozed away from him; and when he was shown into the parlour, in which Jessie Maclean was waiting, a dreadful consciousness broke over him that he had made a mistake. Jess, poor girl, tried to pretend that she did not notice anything unusual in his attire; but there was a slight flush of embarrassment on her face; and the councillor knew—somehow he knew—that in her heart she was contemplating with dismay the prospect of having to go to the concert with him in this guise.

"Barbara will be ready in a few minutes," Jess said, uneasily, and with her eyes down-cast.

But this casual remark was an inspiration. There was still a precious interval?—there was still a blessed chance of escape? Peter's decision was taken at once. He began to laugh.

"So I have not frightened ye, Miss Jessie?" said he, with a jocosely humorous air. "I thought I would have a little bit of fun; I thought ye'd get a fright if ye fancied I was going to the concert and the dance as a Highland chief. But I'm not so far off my head; no, no; I'm not so far left to myself as to wear things like these—except for a joke, ye understand—except for a joke. And ye may tell Miss Barbara not to hurry; though I'll no be long—no—I'll be back in a jiff." And therewith the councillor, his soul greatly uplifted within him, hurried downstairs, jumped into the 'machine' that had brought him, was driven off home, and there rapidly exchanged his Highland rig for a more sober outfit. When he returned to Mrs. Maclean's house, Barbara was fully equipped; and the three of them drove away to the Drill Hall, Mr. McFadyen being the merriest of the merry.

It was altogether a most successful evening. The Glasgow Choir sang beautifully; at supper Mr. McFadyen welcomed them in a speech that was universally applauded; and when at length the hall was cleared for dancing, everyone was in the highest of spirits. Barbara, in especial, was all animation; she seemed to drink in excitement from this gay scene; there was a tinge of colour in her cheek, a glow in her great eyes, that told of her delight. Moreover, Jack Ogilvie had not forgotten his promise; he made Barbara and Jess and the councillor objects of special attention; any one could see they were a favoured group. And at supper, if he did not actually sit with them—for he had to look chiefly after the guests from a distance—at least he came along and chatted with them at times.

“And what dances are you going to give me, Miss Barbara?” said he, on one of these occasions. “No. 1 is a quadrille: Suppose we make up a party for that? And you must give me a waltz—and maybe two before the night is out. No. 9 is a mazourka——”

“We must not stay here late,” interposed Jess—seeing that Barbara was ready to accept all the dances that the Purser proposed.

“Come, come, it is I that am in authority here,” the councillor insisted, “and I’ll have no spiriting away of Cinderellas before the proper time. We’ll begin with the first quadrille—the four of us here vis-à-vis—and we’ll see about the other dances as they come. I’m just in the mood for enjoying myself the night; yes, I’m that; and we’ll show them how to keep it up!”

But of all the varied features of this memorable evening none was more remarkable, in Jessie Maclean’s eyes, than the ease and elegance with which Barbara danced. Where and how had the Highland lass, away out in the rude island, picked up such an accomplishment, and attained to such a proficiency? Her naturally graceful figure was seen to the best advantage in all these evolutions; no wonder (Jess said to herself) that the young men regarded her with covertly admiring glances, and appeared proud and pleased when they were privileged to join hands with her in coming and going. Never before had the councillor found himself so much sought after by those young sparks of whom he was naturally inclined to be somewhat jealous.

There was one other who, for a few terrible

seconds, beheld Barbara in this her hour of display and triumph. The Drill Hall of Duntroone is situated in an out-of-the-way and ill-lighted lane; and the school-master, wandering aimlessly about in the dark, found himself, he hardly knew why, drawn to that long and dusky building from which sounds of music issued into the hollow air. He approached nearer and nearer. The entrance-door, for the sake of ventilation, had been left half-open; there were two or three idle lads hanging about and looking in; he also, if he chose, might gaze upon that brilliant throng, himself unseen. He wished to go away, and could not; some powerful fascination dragged him onward; at last the dark and glowing eyes were staring in, from this outer gloom. And as it chanced it was a waltz that was being performed; the couples circling swiftly and easily; the music rising and falling in cadence. And then his eyes seemed to be seared as with a red-hot iron: there was Barbara, in all the flush of her youthful grace and beauty; and Ogilvie it was who held her one hand clasped in his, whose arm encircled her yielding form. It was plaintive music that sounded down the long hall—so plaintive that there almost

appeared to be some cry of human agony in it—some despairing note of severance and loss and farewell. Trembling and haggard of visage, the onlooker drew himself away and hid himself in the night: it was as if he had been blinded, and knew not whither he was going.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE VERGE.

ALL through the black hours of that night he wandered round the shore and the rocks, while the moving world of waters moaned in the dark, and the golden ray of Lismore burned steadily. And still he seemed to hear the low and piteous strains of waltz-music, that spoke of tragic separation and farewell; and still he seemed to be at a half-open door, sheltered by the obscurity, and gazing in upon that brilliant throng, with one figure there receding from him, as it were, and being lost to him for ever. When would they have done with their dancing? When would the colours fade, and the lights go out, and the hush of sleep fall over the small town? The sound of the revelry appeared to follow him: he heard

it all through the unvaried, incessant, mysterious murmur of the sea.

The long night went by ; a pale and wan glow slowly grew in the east ; the hills and woods became dimly distinguishable ; the trembling plain of water gradually revealed itself, livid and solitary ; beyond, the mountains of Mull and Morven were still swathed in heavy folds of cloud. And what was this object nearer at hand—this first sign of human habitation—what but the grey little inn at Cowal Ferry, surrounded by its silent homestead ? At this time of the morning it appeared but as the ghost of a house ; and the tale connected with it seemed to have likewise acquired a kind of remoteness ; would the day break into clear and white light, and show firmer and hopefuller things, and drive away those distracting phantoms of the past ?

Towards eight o'clock or thereabouts he knew that Jess Maclean and the young girl Christina would come downstairs in order to open the shop ; and a little before that hour he returned to Duntroone, passing along Campbell Street. He saw the two girls appear and cross the half-empty thoroughfare. He watched Christina take down the

shutters. And when, after a few minutes, she went back to the house, leaving Jess in sole possession, he walked forward more quickly. Jess was in the front shop when he entered.

"You are early astir, Jessie, after your last night's gaieties," said he, with apparent calm; but despite this forced composure, there was something in his tone, something in his aspect, too, that caused her serious disquiet.

"What is the matter, Allan?" she demanded at once.

"Well, I have come to you in my trouble," said he. "Does that surprise you? It seems but natural I should come to you. Your own life is so placid and happy that suffering and tortured wretches come to you as if by some kind of instinct, for consolation and sympathy. And you can tell me—Jess, I'm sure you can tell me," he went on, in a more hurried and anxious manner, "whether there is anything between Barbara and Ogilvie. What is it? What is there? Why should there be any secrecy? How did she come to be with him in the inn at Cowal; and how did neither your mother nor you know she was going? What does he mean by it? He can have his pick and choice of so many

—so they say—he gives himself the airs of a lady-killer—why should he turn aside for a simple girl like Barbara? I went to her, and asked her,” he continued, in his too evident distress, “and she had nothing for me but angry words and taunts. Plainly enough she told me it was none of my business—that I had no right to interfere. And perhaps I have not; I had hoped for some better understanding with her; but now, it seems, I must not even speak. And yet how can one stand by and look on—when you see a young girl ignorant of the ways of the world being made a fool of, made sport of, for the amusement of an empty-headed fribble? Is that what it is? Or what else is it? What does it mean?”

“Come into the parlour, Allan, and sit down,” said Jess Maclean, in her gentle fashion; and he followed her into the room—but he remained standing, his eyes eagerly searching for an answer in the expression of her face.

And yet it was about himself that she was mostly concerned.

“You are not looking well,” said she—and somehow she half-guessed that he had been wandering to and fro during the night.

“Have you had your breakfast this morning, Allan?”

“Never mind about that,” he replied. And then he proceeded, rapidly: “Tell me, Jessie—what am I to believe about Barbara? Is there anything between her and Ogilvie? And is she concealing it?—and why? You must know. You are with her constantly. And I can appeal to you for an honest answer and a friendly answer. You will tell me the truth—whatever it is; and whatever it is, the sooner it is known the better. To you anyway I can appeal, without being taunted and scorned.”

Jess was quietly and quickly stirring up the fire, and putting on the kettle, and getting out the tea-pot and the like; and as she went on with these little preparations—the object of which was in nowise perceived by the schoolmaster—she said in her tranquil way:

“I would not bother much about Ogilvie, if I were you, Allan. I don’t suppose he means anything. He is always running after one pretty face or another; and there’s safety in numbers; I hardly imagine he can mean anything serious with regard to Barbara. A bit of amusement, perhaps——”

“Amusement?” he repeated, vehemently. “Amusement that may wreck her peace of mind—that may ruin her life? If that is the state of affairs, it is time for one of us to step in; and whether I have the right or not, I will assume the right. She shall not be left defenceless, simply through her ignorance. And perhaps,” he said, “perhaps you, too, will tell me it is none of my business——”

“I don’t think, Allan, you ever found me blaming you for anything,” Jess made answer: she was putting a white cloth over the little table.

“Jess, I beg your pardon!” he said, with instant remorse. “If I have one friend, it’s you. I am always safe in coming to you. But I am all at sixes and sevens; worried and harassed; unable to understand what is happening around me. I wonder if you know how other people must envy you your quiet and peaceful life—how you make one wish to be rid for ever of maddening hopes and aims. It must be so fine to be contentedly happy—to be without a care.”

“Without a care,” murmured Jess, almost to herself. “Ay, just that, Allan. Without a care. You may well say that. Without

a care." Her back was towards him, for she was about to fetch down a cruet-stand from the cupboard ; so that unobserved she managed to brush away a tear or two that had started to her lashes. Then she turned. "Now, Allan," said she, cheerfully, "sit down at once. It's but little we keep over here ; only you can't go along to the school without a mouthful by way of breakfast."

He would have refused, but she insisted ; and eventually, out of mere gratitude, he was forced to sit down.

"I looked in at the Drill Hall," he said, slowly and in sombre fashion—and small was the heed he paid to these things before him, though Jess stood by him waiting upon him, as if he were an infant. "I saw Barbara—she was dancing with Ogilvie."

"Well, now," observed Jess, with much blitheness of manner, "is it not surprising that she should have learnt to dance so well, away out in such a place as Kilree ! And no one suspecting it either. But that is the strange thing about Barbara : if you do not find out for yourself, she will never tell you——"

"Ay, have you discovered that ?" he said, glancing towards her quickly. "Have you

discovered that too?" And then he continued—it was a relief to talk—"Do you know that sometimes she seems to me altogether an enigma; I cannot make her out; it is as if she had depths of character that no one around her understands as yet. And then again these appear to me mere formless and vacant spaces—the vacant spaces of youth, that time and experience will fill up. Besides, her natural shyness has to be taken into account—a shyness only to be expected in one brought up in that solitary island, and then coming among strangers——"

"I am sure," said Jess, "mother and I do not wish her to regard us as strangers—far indeed from that; but I think she hides herself from us as much as from others; and of course when any one prefers to keep their own counsel, it would only be impertinence to press questions."

"Then Barbara has said nothing to you about Ogilvie?" he asked, of a sudden.

"Not a word," was the definite answer. "Not a word—and until she offers us her confidence, we are not likely to make ourselves intrusive. If Barbara wishes to keep her own secrets, she is welcome."

He had pushed away his plate. His hands

were resting on his knees; his eyes were downcast, in profound meditation.

“She is a strange creature,” said he. “I had done nothing to anger her. Well, yes: perhaps she was in the right in resenting my interference. When I warned her—when I presumed to warn her—perhaps it was only her maidenly pride that retorted. As you say, when she chooses to keep silent, that may be merely her natural habit; and of course she would be indignant on being pressed with questions. It is quite wonderful, Jessie, how you find excuses for people; how you seek for the best that is in them; your disposition is so good-natured; you want the world to go easily with every one. And indeed, whenever I have a talk with you, it does seem as if things were more hopeful, as if troubles and difficulties could be overcome; and you must never think that I am not grateful to you because I am a bad hand at making pretty speeches. You must just understand. When you meet a human being who seems to have the faculty of reconciling you to the harsh terms of existence, it is a marvellous kind of thing, and you ought to be grateful—but perhaps you have not quite got the knack of saying so——”

“Enough, enough, Allan,” said Jess—her face burning with pleasure: for when had she received such praise from him before?

Then he got to his feet.

“I must along to the school now, Jessie,” said he.

“And do not put yourself out about the Purser,” she observed to him, as her parting word. “He has too many strings to his bow. And besides, I have heard him say that he wanted to leave this place altogether. Surely, Barbara must have too much sense to attach herself to a sailor-lad, that may be off to the West Indies to-morrow. And if you and she have had a quarrel, you’ll just have to set to work to make it up again.”

He went away much lighter of heart because of her sisterly kindness and wise talk; but his temperament was brooding rather than sanguine; and during the long school-hours of mechanical and ungrateful toil, his thoughts would go back to the position in which he had been placed by Barbara’s disdainful challenge. ‘If you want any explanations—if you think you have been injured,’ she had practically said, ‘go to Ogilvie: he will answer you—he will answer for us both.’ It was scornful advice, but it

fitted in only too readily with his own humour. He had not got that under-jaw for nothing ; and the longer that the lined and knit brows pondered over the problem now before him, the more definite became his resolve that Ogilvie should not go on his way without one word of question, perhaps even of menace. For the moment, indeed, that was impossible : on the day following the concert and dance, the *Aros Castle*, her steam-tubes mended, sailed for Loch Sunart.

But, as it chanced, on the very afternoon of her return, the schoolmaster caught sight of Jack Ogilvie, who was apparently leaving the outskirts of the town for a stroll ; and in an instant all Jess's persuasive and kindly counsels had vanished from his mind : he saw in the distance only the man who had, from vanity, or devilment, or mere thoughtless disregard of consequences, been leading an inexperienced girl astray, and alienating her from her nearest friends. Without any very clear intention he followed. By the lodge-gate Ogilvie passed into the grounds surrounding the ruins of Duntroone Castle : these are thrown open to the public on certain days of the week ; but at this season of the year, when there were no tourists

abroad, the place was quite deserted ; and in point of fact the Purser continued on his way through the woods without meeting a human being, whether or not he may have been aware that some one was behind him. In due course of time he came in sight of the sea again, and of the castle hill, with the ivied ruins lofty and dark against the west. He skirted a small bay, went along an avenue of elms, and began to ascend a steep slope. And all this time Henderson was in his wake : the schoolmaster knowing not what to think or what to do, so diverse were the doubts and impulses that occupied his brain. But momentarily his face was growing darker.

Of course he could not always maintain this equal distance between himself and his enemy, for the Purser, having reached the summit of the hill, stopped short, and began to look around him—at the wide panorama, stretching from Ardencaple in the south to Morven and Kingairloch in the north. It was towards the close of the day ; there was a steely light in the breaks of the clouded sky, and a metallic gleam on the restlessly lapping water ; but over Mull way there were great masses of soft rain-cloud slowly advancing, that threatened to blot out the livid

glare and bring on premature night. And seemingly Ogilvie had no intention of remaining on this solitary eminence; having walked to the edge of the plateau and glanced downwards and around he idly turned to come away again; and then it was that he found himself face to face with Allan Henderson.

For a second the two men regarded each other; and instinctively no phrase of greeting was passed.

"I am glad to have the chance of a word with you alone," the schoolmaster said, after this momentary silence.

"You need not have come so far," said the Purser, who began to guess that his footsteps had been dogged.

"I was considering what I ought to say," Henderson proceeded, apparently determined to keep a firm hold over himself.

"And have you considered?—for it is about time for me to be getting home," Ogilvie made answer. Not a syllable had been uttered that could cause offence to either; but already the two men were in open antagonism.

"It is about Barbara Maclean——"

"Oh, indeed!"

“ And I have a question to ask of you——”

“ Suppose I don’t choose to answer it.”

“ I will make you answer it.”

“ Making? Making? That is easily said !”

The schoolmaster was breathing a little more hardly : that was all. Ogilvie had assumed a certain jaunty indifference of air.

“ You’ve got to tell me what you mean,” Allan went on—with the dark eyes beginning to flame.

“ Mean by what ?” said the other, scornfully.

“ Well enough you know ! And don’t you think I am going to stand by, and let you make a plaything of a girl like that, who does not know what all this nonsense may lead to. For I suppose it is nonsense. I do not imagine a fine gentleman like you could have any serious intentions——”

“ And who made it your business to interfere ?” the Purser said, defiantly.

“ I have made it my business ; and I mean to make it my business,” was the stern rejoinder. “ If you have no regard for the good name of the girl, it is for others to see that she is warned, and that you are checked——”

“A rare fuss to make about nothing!” Ogilvie interjected again. “Why, anyone can call in at a tobacconist’s shop who has the price of an ounce of bird’s-eye.”

“Does the price of an ounce of bird’s-eye entitle you to sit in the parlour—or make assignments?”

“Oh, I’m sick of this rubbish!” the Purser exclaimed—and he made as if he would pass. But Henderson planted himself in front of him.

“No, you are not going yet. You are not going until you have given me explanations and made me certain promises. But how could I believe your promises—the promises of a miserable hound like you, that would lead a thoughtless girl into a compromising situation! What were she and you doing at Cowal Ferry?” he demanded, with increasing vehemence. “You considered it fine, I suppose, to have the story told about you! You considered it a joke, I suppose, that her good name should be put in peril—that she should become a byword——”

“You lie!”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the schoolmaster had hurled himself upon him and seized him by the throat; and

so sudden and so violent was the onset that both men rolled to the ground, the Purser writhing and struggling to free himself from this wild-cat grip. Henderson striving to pinion him to the earth. Ogilvie was no doubt the bulkier of the two; but the schoolmaster's muscles were of iron, while hate and jealousy combined lent him a yet fiercer strength; so that it was in vain that the undermost of the adversaries fought and tore and flung himself this way and that in trying to liberate himself from this merciless grasp. And then something happened to Allan Henderson. In their savage wrestling they had unwittingly approached the edge of the precipitous cliff; and of a sudden it chanced that the schoolmaster caught sight of a dull red patch, far below him, in the old garden lying between the castle-rock and the sea. It was probably a patch of withered herbage; but with a startling vividness it recalled to him what he had seen one day when in the company of a gamekeeper-friend—a wounded roe-deer having rolled over and down into a deep chasm, where it lay motionless and hardly to be distinguished from a heap of rusted bracken. And at this same instant it flashed through his brain that the man whose

very life he now held in pawn might in another moment be lying away down there, without movement, an inanimate, indistinguishable thing, a horror to the eyes. He relaxed his grip.

“Come back,” he said, hoarsely. “There shall be no murder.”

And it was not until he was released that Jack Ogilvie perceived how near he had been to his doom. Thoroughly cowed—without a solitary word of threatening or bravado—he retreated from that ghastly verge, and shook his clothes straight, and departed down the hill, disappearing among the trees. After a while, amid the gathering dusk, the schoolmaster followed. As he slowly made his way back to the town, an orange spot here and there told of a lighted window and the coming night. And it may have seemed to him, in his sombre reverie, that it was more easy to seize an enemy, and pin him by the throat, and hold the power of life and death over him—it was more easy to do that than to win a single friendly look from a woman whose heart had wandered elsewhither.

CHAPTER VII.

PRINCE BEELZEBUB.

It was a brilliant morning—the hills all the way from Mull to Kingairloch clear to the top—the sea a vivid and trembling blue—the sunlight warm on the yellow-green slopes of Kerrara. And the councillor, rejoicing in the sweet air and in the proud consciousness of manly vigour, was gaily humming to himself—

*‘If you on my dear one should gaze, should gaze,
If you were to hear what she says, she says,
If you heard my pretty
One singing her ditty,
Your bosom would get in a blaze, a blaze.’*

Nevertheless he had business on hand, for he carried a small parcel tucked under his elbow; and in due course he left the harbour-front, and passed along a side-street, until

he came to Long Lauchie's shop, which he entered. MacIntyre looked up from his work, the sallow face more sunken and melancholy than ever.

"Good morning, friend Lauchlan," said the councillor, blithely, as he undid the parcel, producing a pair of dancing shoes. "I've a bit job here I wish ye'd do for me. The fact is, once or twice lately, when I've been at a little merrymaking, the next day I've noticed my toes hurt me round the outside—not that it's gout or anything of that sort—for I'm a very moderate drinker—though the doctor says I might as well give up beer——"

"Beer," observed Lauchlan, sadly shaking his head, "beer is a mocker. And moderate drinking, Mr. McFadyen, that's the worst of any. That's the fatal thing. Look at the insurance companies—look at the per centage in favour of the total abstainer——"

"Oh, hang your insurance companies!" cried the councillor. "Listen to me now. I've been thinking you could make a bit slit along the side—close to the sole—and it would not be seen if I wore black stockings. Do you understand? A little bit easement, as it were; for I'm just desperate disinclined

to get a new pair—a new pair of shoes is torture to me for months. Do ye understand, Lauchlan—a slit that will not be seen——”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said Long Lauchie. He examined the shoes, and carelessly put them aside: it was not a paying job. Then he rose, and as his visitor was leaving, Lauchie accompanied him out to the front.

“It’s fine weather,” remarked the shoemaker, as he glanced up and down the pavement.

But of a sudden his countenance underwent an extraordinary change. Amazement first, then terror—abject terror—was in his eyes.

“God help us,” he exclaimed, as he instantly slunk back into the entry, “there’s that woman! Mr. McFadyen, tell her I’m dead!—tell her I’m not living here any more.” And with that he vanished, leaving the councillor not a little bewildered.

There now appeared on the scene a woman rather short of figure, with sharp and angular features, sandy hair, and vindictive grey eyes.

“Was that him? Did I see him?” she demanded of the astonished McFadyen; but she did not wait for an answer; she whisked by him, and went straight into the cobbler’s

shop, which was apparently empty. "Where are you, you scoundrel!" she called aloud—looking round at the vacant spaces. "I'm for seeing ye face-to-face this time! No more banishment for me, and living on friends, when there's a drunken vagabond should be supporting me!"

The councillor had followed her—she was partly addressing him.

"I've heard of his goings-on!" she cried. "I've heard of his practices! But I'll see to it that there's no woman coming about this house—a decent, respectable house it was until I was forced to leave it by that drinking ne'er-do-weel. And just let me find the hussy: my word, I'll put my ten commandments on her, that will I! And where is he?—where is he?—let me get at him now!"

She marched along the passage; with swift and bodeful steps she ascended the staircase; she flung open the door. But apparently the shoemaker's apartments, which consisted of a kitchen and bedroom, were tenantless.

"Where are you, you scoundrel!" she called again, in menacing tones. "Let me see ye!—let my ten nails get at ye!"

"My good woman," the councillor protested, "this is entirely reprehensible! If

you have a complaint to make, let it be done in order. There's law and civilised custom in this town——”

“Ay, would ye defend him, you old reprobate?” she retorted, furiously. “Ye're as bad as he is, I can see by your looks! Blackguards both o' ye, that's what ye are!—But ye'll not hinder me!”

From the empty kitchen she swept into the empty bedroom; and there the first object that appeared to attract her attention and her wrath was a small mirror standing on the top of a chest of drawers.

“Ay,” she exclaimed, “and has she been decking herself in front of my glass, the brazen trollop?—But she'll deck herself at my glass no more!” She lifted a cane-bottomed chair and with one drive sent the mirror, glass and woodwork and all, into a hundred fragments. “And looking at my pictures too?” the virago screamed in her rage; and this time the legs of the cane-bottomed chair went crashing through a framed and glazed coloured print of St. John the Baptist. “And my ewer—and my soap-dish—and my tumbler—” The work of devastation proceeded apace; the noise was like the falling of tenements during an

earthquake; until at length, when nothing breakable had been left, the shoemaker's wife put down the chair in the midst of the ruins, and seated herself on it, a smile of pitiless triumph on her face.

"Let her come now!" she said, with cruel irony. "Let her come and take possession! Maybe she'll deck herself at my glass, and be keeking into my press, and thinking that I'm going to stop at Fort William for ever and ever, and let him and her and their fine jigmaleeries pass by without a word! But maybe she'll not find it so easy now to put on her ribbons in front of my glass——"

"Really—really," said the councillor—who for prudential reasons had remained at the door—"really—if you are Mrs. MacIntyre——"

"If I am Mrs. MacIntyre?" she cried—her small grey eyes glittering with anger. "Who am I, then, if I am not Mrs. MacIntyre? What do you take me for? Do ye think I am one of the low creatures you and he consort wi'? Away with ye about your business, you old profligate! Here I am; and here I sit; until that man comes home."

But at this point she seemed to change

her mind. She rose, seized the chair, and advanced to the door; and when the councillor—only too ready to give her a wide berth—had made way for her on the landing, she proceeded down the staircase and took up a position in the entry.

“Let him try to get into either shop or house,” said she, as she planted herself again on the chair. “I’m ready for him. I’ve had enough of living upon friends, and him spending every penny in the public-houses——”

“Really, Mrs. MacIntyre,” said the councillor, as he sidled past her, in order to have free access to the street, “if you consider yourself injured, this is not the proper manner——”

“Away with ye, ye wicked old wretch!” she broke in, scornfully. “You’re worse than he is—you’re a hundred times worse than he is, or you wouldna’ be making excuses for him. But you need not come with your excuses to me. What I want is Lauchlan MacIntyre; and face-to-face will I have him before me, if I wait here till the Judgment-day. Here I am; and here I sit; if he has anything to say to me, I am ready for him.”

Confronted by this implacable resolution, the councillor found himself helpless; but indeed he did not feel called upon to interfere further, for he was no particular friend of the shoemaker's. Accordingly, and not unwillingly, he took his leave—reflecting that married life appeared occasionally to have its drawbacks, and wondering by what mysterious means Long Lauchie had managed to escape.

But at this precise moment Long Lauchie had not yet escaped, he was only on the point of escaping. It was not until the wild commotion of the furniture-breaking had subsided—it was not until peace once more reigned in the demolished room—that a black head and yellow visage were slowly and cautiously protruded from under the counterpane of the bed. A careful look round—and the prone figure of the shoemaker followed. As Lauchie rose to his feet, the last rumblings of the storm were still audible below; for he could hear his injured wife announcing to the councillor her determination to remain a fixture; but here, in this little room, a painful stillness prevailed; the tornado had expended itself, leaving behind it nothing but wreckage and

ruin. Lauchlan did not stay to contemplate this lamentable spectacle. For a moment or two he listened intently; then on tiptoe and stealthily he crossed over to the window; he listened again; and presently, and with the greatest wariness, he began to raise the lower sash. One inch—two inches—and there was no creaking. A few inches further—and there was room for him to put out his head and reconnoitre: he perceived that with the aid of a rain-water barrel it was possible for him to reach the ground. So again he raised the window a few inches, and this also was accomplished in blessed silence; he put one leg over the sill; its fellow followed; then the long, lank body; in a second or so Lauchlan's feet were resting on the solid wooden covering of the water-butt. From thence he dropped into the yard; he scrambled over the stone wall; he pursued his way swiftly along the lane until he gained a side-street; and there he found safe haven in a public-house with which he seemed to be familiar.

“A glass of whisky, Mr. Pattison,” he gasped—for these unwonted exertions had rendered him breathless.

“But what have ye done with your hat,

Mr. MacIntyre?" said the publican, as he proceeded to get the cordial.

Then Lauchlan remembered that he had nothing on his head save its natural covering.

"Oh," said he, uneasily, "the—the wind blew it away. But I'm sure you'll be lending me one, Mr. Pattison, until I get home."

And then it sadly occurred to him that for him there was no returning home, while that fearful being barred the way; and in his perplexity and helplessness he resolved upon confessing the truth to Mr. Pattison.

"No," said he, "I will not tell you any lies. And the fact is, Mr. Pattison, that I have ran aweh from the house, for my wife is there, and raging like a she-duvvle, and ahl the furniture brokken, and I do not know what more she would be doing if I went back."

"Well, that is a pretty pass!" said the sympathising publican. "Ye'll have to take Sandy the policeman with ye, and drive her out."

"Sandy?—the lad Sandy?" remonstrated the shoemaker, in accents of reproach. "The poor lad!—could I ask him to face a raging teeger like that?"

"And what will you do, then?" was the next question.

“Ay, that is what I am not knowing myself,” answered Lauchlan, with something of a melancholy air; and thereupon, having borrowed a hat from Mr. Pattison, he set out once more on his travels.

Now it happened during his subsequent wanderings from one howff to another that the homeless shoemaker encountered Niall Gorach; and it occurred to him that he could not do better than engage the half-witted youth to go and pry about and discover whether Mrs. MacIntyre had as yet taken it into her head to vacate the premises. When Niall had been got to understand what was wanted, he went off; but on his return his report was discouraging; the “wumman” was still in the entry seated on a chair. The disconsolate shoemaker now took Niall with him as the only companion that was available; and as a few glasses of whisky, taken at various points and stages, had made him communicative, not to say amiably garrulous, he described to the lad the unhappy predicament in which he was placed.

“It is I that could drive her out of the house,” said Niall, in a darkly meditative manner. He spoke in Gaelic.

“You?” rejoined the shoemaker, in the

same tongue, and he was laughing now and very merry. "Oh, yes, it is your head that has the sense in it, and no mistake! And do you know what she would do to you, my fine boy?—she would eat you at a mouthful! Oh, yes, you are the grand one to drive her out of the house!——"

"What will you give me?—will you give me a sixpence?" said Niall, paying no heed to his playful irony.

"But before I give you a sixpence, or the half of a sixpence," said the shoemaker, with contemptuous mirth, "maybe you would be for telling me how you are going near her? Niall, my fine lad, you do not know what that kind of a woman is, or twenty hundred sixpences would be no temptation for you——"

"As soon as it is dark," said Niall Gorach, doggedly, "it is I that could drive her out, if there is a back way into the house."

"And how would you do it, my noble hero—how would you do it?" he asked—but he was fumbling about in his pocket for a match.

"I would show her the Prince," said Niall, with his elfin eyes peering upwards to his companion's face.

Long Lauchie only laughed and giggled the more.

"It's little you understand, my brave youth, what kind of a woman that is. Aw, Dyeea, she would eat you at a mouthful! Do you think I would allow it?—no, not if Sandy the policeman went with you——"

"Will you give me the sixpence?" said Niall: and then he added, in a mysterious whisper: "I would show her Prince Beelzebub; and anyone that is seeing him will go mad. There was a man at Taynult that struck me with a whip; and one night Prince Beelzebub went to see him, and he was ill in bed for more than a week after it. Maybe—well, maybe he was not for striking me with a whip during that week."

The shoemaker began to show a little more attention, though he was still incredulous and vaguely amused.

"Now what is the witch's cantrip you would be after, you limb of Satan!" he exclaimed. "Well I know there are queer things get into that noddle of yours; but sure I am, my famous warrior, that you would make the greatest mistake of your life if you tried to go near the she-devil that is in my house. Niall, my son, I will tell you

the truth, and this is the truth—that when she is in the inside of the dwelling, the outside of the dwelling is the best place.”

Niall was still stealthily and eagerly scrutinising his companion's features; but the fact is that Long Lauchie seemed now too vacuously happy to pay much heed to anything. It was his search after a match that chiefly concerned him. There even appeared some probability that he would forget all about his wife being in possession of his home.

“It is not the head of a man,” continued Niall, still ‘glowering’ and watchful, “that Prince Beelzebub has on him, but it is something more terrible than any head, and there are two eyes, and the light is on them——”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said the shoemaker, contemptuously, “and it is a wise lad you are to think of frightening people with a hollowed turnip and a candle.” Then of a sudden some idea seemed to strike him. “Niall,” said he, in an undertone, and his bemused eyes were mirthful now, “could you give that devil of a woman a fearful fright? Could you now? Is that your intention? For if you do it well, I will pay you not one sixpence but two sixpences, and that as sure

as death. Will you make her jump? Will you make her spring out of her senses? Niall, you are the son of my heart! Will you make her fly? Will you make her scream? Aw, Dyeea, it would be worth a hundred pounds to see her jumping with terror!"

"If there is a back way into the house," said Niall, slowly, "the Prince could get at her——"

"There is—there is!" said Lauchlan, in great excitement. "There is the rain barrel—and the window I left open—Niall, will you make her jump?—will she scream out, do you think?—it is I that would be laughing, if I could hide somewhere on the other side of the street——"

"Give me one of the sixpences now," said Niall, regarding him furtively. "Maybe I will have to offer something to the Prince."

Lauchlan put his hand in his pocket.

"And mind you this, you imp of a warlock," said he, "if it is lies you are telling me I will break every bone in your body."

It was some two hours thereafter, as the twilight was deepening into dark, that Niall Gorach cautiously clambered over the wall of Long Lauchie's backyard, and crossed

to the rain barrel, and ascended to the open window. Between his teeth he held the end of a piece of string; and when he had reached the sill, and peered into the room to make sure no one was there, he noiselessly hauled up after him a bundle to which the cord was attached. The demolished apartment was now shrouded deep in gloom; and a profound silence prevailed. In this ghostly stillness Niall began to undo his bundle; and not a whisper of a sound betrayed his presence.

About ten minutes or a quarter of an hour later there emerged on to the landing one of the most extraordinary apparitions that the sick brain of any mortal creature ever conceived. It was a figure of more than normal height, draped entirely in black, the shoulders, or what might pass for shoulders, square, the two extended arms bearing each a lighted candle. But the astonishing and alarming feature of this phenomenon was that instead of having anything like a human head on its square shoulders, the head was that of some owl-like animal; and the two eyes, each in its hollow recess, caught the light of the candles, and seemed to burn with some infernal flame. This hideous and ghastly

manifestation now proceeded to descend the stairway, not even a rustle of the black drapery giving notice of its approach ; and when within two steps of the foot it paused.

“Pentateuch ! — Pentateuch ! ” said a mournful voice.

There was a woman sitting in the dusk of the passage. At this sound she turned her head ; the next moment, with a wild scream of terror, she had sprang to her feet ; the next moment, with shriek after shriek—and shriek after shriek—she had fled into the outer air, and was blindly rushing down the street, as if all the fiends of pandemonium were after her. She did not seem to know whither she was going ; she waited for no answer to her piercing cries ; to get away from this horrible, unnameable, appalling thing was her only aim. And meanwhile Long Lauchlan the shoemaker, hidden in the friendly shelter of a door over the way, was slapping his thighs, and shaking and laughing with inextinguishable laughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI.

ON one of these evenings Mrs. Maclean was as usual in the little parlour, seated in her easy-chair, and placidly knitting, and Jess, at the central table, was engaged with her business accounts, when Barbara, dressed up in all her finery, appeared at the partially opened door. After a single glance round the room, she seemed to hesitate about an excuse for withdrawing again.

“ I was just looking in— ” she said.

“ And finding nobody,” suggested the little widow, with sly sarcasm.

This was something of a challenge; and Barbara at once went into the parlour, and sate down.

“ Not but that we’re rather dull company,” the widow continued, “ for there’s not so

many coming about as there used to be. The lad Allan I can understand; he is busy with his classes; and right glad am I that he is getting on so well. But Ogilvie—what have ye been doing to Johnnie Ogilvie, Barbara? They tell me he paid ye great attention at the ball of the Gaelic Choir; and he used to look in of an evening pretty regular; but now one hears or sees nothing of him——”

“And perhaps it is better I should hear or see nothing of him,” said Barbara, sharply, “if there is to be such a work about my taking a cup of tea at Cowal Ferry!”

“I did not know there was any such work made,” rejoined the widow, with her customary good-humour, “though a young lass cannot be too careful about appearances.” She looked up from her knitting, and scanned the girl’s costume for a moment. “But are ye sure you were not expecting any one, Barbara? You’re finely decked out, to be merely going down the town on an errand or two. In my young days I would not have thought of putting on a hat and feathers if I was only going for a can of mulattoes to flavour the rice for supper——”

“Mother,” interposed Jess, glancing up from her accounts, “you may have what you

like; but rice flavoured with mulattoes will be no supper for me. Is it molasses you mean?"

"Yes, just that," the widow proceeded, cheerfully. "And has there been a quarrel between you and Ogilvie, Barbara? And are you thinking to fetch him back with a hat and feathers? Well, well: Every one must have her own way of managing her sweetheart. When I was young they used to say 'Goat's milk and sweet violets to wash your face with; and there's not a King's son in the world but then will be running after you.'"

"Perhaps I am not wishing for any sweetheart," said Barbara, sullenly.

"And yet," observed Mrs. Maclean, her eyes demurely bent on her work, "and yet you took a present—and a very handsome present—from Allan Henderson."

"Allan Henderson?" retorted Barbara. "I do not care to have anything to do with him and his ill-temper."

But at this Jess Maclean fired up.

"Ill-temper?" said she. "And what do you mean by ill-temper? If to have scorn and contempt for meanness, and cunning, and despicable things generally, if that is to

be ill-tempered, then he is ill-tempered, but not in any other way. Allan Henderson is a man who has his own opinions, his own character, his own standards of what is worth seeking for; he is not a mere copy and echo of other people; and if he does not strive to please, and say pretty things, I respect him all the more for it. Striving to please!—any empty-headed coxcomb can do that——”

“Oh, yes, you are always on the side of the schoolmaster!” Barbara said, tauntingly; and at that Jess Maclean’s fair and freckled face became suffused with colour, and she was proudly silent. The widow did not notice this confusion; she had returned to the subject of sweethearts; and she was relating the story of the northern maiden whose lover, on the eve of their wedding, was drowned at sea: how the girl pined away and died, her last request being that she also should have an ocean grave; how her relatives refused, preferring that she should be buried in the churchyard of a neighbouring island; how, on their setting sail, they encountered a dreadful storm that they interpreted as a warning from Heaven; and how, when they at length carried out

her wishes and consigned the corpse to the deep, the phantom of her lover was seen to arise from the waves and clasp her in his arms. It is an old and familiar tale that has been told round many a peat fire; but Barbara had not heard it; and she listened to it with the entranced eyes of a child.

The narrative had hardly been finished when there was a tapping at the door, and the next moment the tall and spare form of the young schoolmaster appeared. He looked startled, almost dismayed, when he perceived that Barbara was seated there; but no escape was possible for him; for in an instant the little widow had dashed aside her work, and ran to him, and caught him by one hand, while with the other, as she dragged him into the room, she patted him affectionately on the shoulder.

“Welcome indeed to the hearth, as they say in the Gaelic,” she cried. “Allan, my lad, I never see you but I feel that blood is thicker than water; and it is only a few minutes ago I was talking of your absence; though some would say I should not complain since it is plenty of work that has been keeping you away. And here is your own chair, that always looks empty when you are

not here; and you will light your pipe now, and give us your news; for though Jessie is always telling us of the great things you are doing and going to do, sure I am you will not show yourself proud and forgetful of your own people. And I hope the classes are getting bigger and bigger, and the boys keeping obedient——”

“Oh, yes,” said Jess, with a laugh. “Allan is a fine one to be teaching those young lads the humanities! It is much of the humanities they are likely to learn! I know the humanities they are likely to have set before them—impatience, and brow-beating, and contempt of the whole of the rest of the civilised world——”

“You’ve never a good word for me, Jessie,” said he, as he took his seat.

“And that’s true—that’s true!” interposed her mother, quickly. “She never has a good word for you—before your face, Allan; but behind your back—you should just hear her! Behind your back—that’s another story! Was it ten minutes since, was it as much as ten minutes since she was defending you, and praising you, and telling us how you were different from other people, and everything splendid, and just the one single person

in the world to be admired. "Oh, yes," continued the garrulous little widow, in her terrible indiscretion, and now she had turned upon Jess, "yes, yes, you may show as much pink in your face as ye like; but when my cousin's son comes to the house, I will see that he is treated with proper civility——"

"I am sure I have little to complain of," Allan said. "Jessie and I understand each other pretty well, I think."

"Will you take a cup of tea now, Allan?" the widow asked.

"I should be glad of it," he made answer, "if it is not too much trouble." And thereupon Mrs. Maclean rose and went to the cupboard: she was delighted that the stiff-necked young man had condescended to accept something at her hands.

All this while he had hardly dared to look Barbara's way; though his whole being was conscious of her presence, and thrilled in response to it: he knew that her eyes, pitiless though they might be, were possibly, even by chance, wandering in his direction. And by subtle degrees the magnetism of this mere proximity had again got hold of him with all its accustomed and mysterious force; his

obduracy melted ; he was ready to forgive her everything bygone—her open preference of another, her bitter words and taunts—if only there was a hope of his winning a friendly look from under the beautiful, long lashes. And it seemed so easy and reasonable for her to be kind. Surely one so bountifully gifted by nature ought to have been grateful to the existing fabric of things, and ready to do a good turn anywhere? How could one so graciously formed be so merciless and cold and distant? Nay, in what inscrutable way did she continue to exercise this irresistible allurements and glamour, if her attitude towards him was intentionally repellent?

“Here, Barbara,” said the light-hearted little widow, “take off your black hat and feathers, and not sit there like a tragedy empress. Get out the cups and saucers ; and Jess—away wi’ those books o’ yours. ‘It’s a’ to pleasure our guidman :’ he’ll be somebody’s guidman all in good time ; and I trust she’ll treat him well after such thankless work as teaching a lot of idle laddies.”

“No, no, you must not say that,” Allan protested. “The school-work during the day may be tiresome enough, and thankless

enough; but as for my own lads that come to me in the evening, I am just proud of them. I had no idea that in a small place like Duntroone there would be so many worthy young fellows determined on self-improvement in spite of their poor and hard circumstances. Where they get time to prepare their tasks I cannot imagine, unless they snatch an hour or two in the early morning, before going to their desk or the counter. And well-behaved in their manner, too——”

“They’d better be!” said Jess, spitefully. “—civil, and attentive, and anxious to win approval. Poor lads,” he continued, with a bit of a sigh, and he appeared to relapse into a profound reverie, “one cannot but sympathise with their ambition; but if they only knew how little a knowledge of books will avail them when they come to live their lives—when they come to discover how inexorable fate is—and how hopeless and cross-grained the world is——”

“Now I’ll not have ye talk like that, Allan!” the widow exclaimed. “I’ll not have ye give way to your black moods—though it’s but natural, living in such a solitary fashion, and not coming among your

friends as much as ye ought. See, try what this will do for you—and a slice or two of cake——”

He paid little attention. His prematurely-lined forehead remained dark and meditative; until Jess—whose keen grey eyes could read his face as if it were a book—thought fit to interfere. She said to him, with frank good-nature—

“Come, now, Allan, listen to me, and I will tell you something. Your evening classes promise so well that they will soon become an institution; and there is one thing an institution cannot do without, and that is an annual *soirée*. The young men will invite their friends, and their sisters, and sweet-hearts; and there will be addresses and songs; and a report in the newspaper, so that your classes will be recognised as one of the established institutions of Duntroone——”

“Indeed, you can talk common-sense when you like, Jess,” her mother said, approvingly, “if ye would not keep bickering at Allan, poor lad. Just a fine advertisement—a fine advertisement to help him in the public notice—most useful—most useful—for if I may say so, Allan, ye’re just a little bit inclined to be reserved and unmanageable——”

"A little bit inclined!" said Jess, with a laugh; but immediately she added: "Well, now, Allan, if you think such a thing would be liked by the lads themselves, you might have the first *soirée* before the summer vacation."

"It's not much of a vacation my youths will expect, or want," the schoolmaster answered her, and he roused himself somewhat. "They are too anxious and eager to get on. I hear now and again of some of their schemes and enterprises—most of them translations and useless things they could never get published, if they had any desire of that kind. But happily there do not seem to be many of them aiming at a literary career; I hope none of them, indeed; that will be one disappointment the less for them, on their way through the world——"

"Your article on the German Folk-songs," said Jess, skilfully intervening, "when will that be published?"

"It is not a subject of much importance," he made answer; "they may hold it over for any length of time. Mr. McFadyen seems more impatient about it than I am."

"I think all of us," said Jess, with her gentle grey eyes glistening with pride and

pleasure. "I think all of us will be interested enough when that number comes out!"

It was now about time for the schoolmaster to be getting along to his Latin Class; and as he rose to take his leave, the warm-hearted little widow was urgent in her entreaties that he should come oftener to see them. The strange thing was that Barbara, who had barely spoken a word during the visit, and hardly seemed to regard herself as one of the company, rose also, and said that she too would be going. Of course he could not assume that she was leaving with him—that he was even to be allowed to hold the door open for her. When he had bade good-bye to the others, he bade good-bye to her; and she coldly and formally gave him her hand. And then he passed through the shop and out into the lamp-lit street: he was on his way home, alone.

He had not gone a dozen yards when he heard light and swift footsteps behind him.

"Mr. Henderson!"

The voice startled him; he turned instantly; and then some wild, bewildering hope flashed through his brain. Had she relented? Had her heart softened after all? Was he now to take her and claim her as

his own? Why was she advancing towards him—here in the magical dusk—if all the possibilities of all the world were not wrapped up in that slim and elegant figure?

It was but a momentary madness that possessed him. Just behind him there was one of the street-lamps; and the dull light it shed upon her features showed all too clearly that it was no compassion, no kindness, that had moved her to this sudden act. The tone of her voice, when she spoke, gave the final deathblow to that distracting fancy.

“I wish to know something from you,” she said, rather breathlessly, and yet with obvious determination. “We—we had some talk about Mr. Ogilvie. And you threatened. What is it you have said or done to him? Something has happened: what is it that has happened? Why does he keep away? It is through you. I know it is through you. What is it you have done?”

He stood irresolute. Even with her face cruel, she looked so winsome! And then to be alone with her—when he could seize both her hands, and hold her, and tell her at last what was in his burning heart. But then again came the despairing consciousness that

it was all in vain ; her voice was angry and menacing ; her demeanour was a challenge.

“ Whatever I did, Barbara,” he said, quite humbly, “ it was through no wish to injure you : it was far different from that.”

“ And who asked you to intermeddle ? ” she demanded, with her lips grown pale. “ And who made you the judge ? Who gave you the right to say what would injure me or not injure me ? ”

“ I told you, Barbara,” he said, gently. “ I told you that I could not stand by and see you being led into a false position through your ignorance of the world. Do you know what people would say—— ”

“ I do not care what people would say ! ” she broke in, sullenly.

“ Then it is for your friends,” said he, with something more of firmness, “ if you are so wilful, it is for your friends to see that this man Ogilvie will not take advantage of your recklessness—— ”

“ What did you do ? ” she broke in again. “ What have you done ? Why does he keep away from us ? It is owing to you—it is you that have done it—well I know that ! ”

“ He can best tell you himself,” Henderson said, calmly, “ why he keeps away from you.

But a young woman would be more regardful of her character who did not show herself so anxious about the visits of a young man."

"My character is my own," said she, hotly, "and I do not wish for friends that have bad suspicions, and that interfere where they are not wanted. I do not wish for such friends. And if you will not tell me what has happened, then I will find out for myself. Yes, indeed! I will get some one to help me—but not your help—I can do without that! If you have said anything to him in my name, I will find it out; and if you have done anything to him, I will find someone who will take my part—but not you—not you!—"

There were some people coming along the almost deserted pavement: she turned from him without another word, and disappeared into the dusk. And then he made his way home—to those busy and eager lads whose confident and courageous interest in the future lying before them was such a beautiful thing, with its touch of sadness too.

CHAPTER IX.

DARK DEALINGS.

ONE morning Barbara Maclean was up on the top of the Gallows Hill, and she was regarding with fixed gaze a small and faintly-red speck that was slowly creeping into this wide panorama of aerial blues and greys. It was the funnel of the *Aros Castle*, that was now on her way across from the Sound of Mull to Duntroone; and as she came along by Lismore light, the dim spot of red gradually took definite shape and brightened in hue, while the black hull of the steamer was now visible amid the waste of waves. Onwards she came—past the Maiden Island—past the end of Kerrera—under the ivied ruins of the Castle—and through the smooth waters of the bay; and by the time she had got in to the South Pier, been made fast

there, and discharged her passengers and cargo, Barbara had descended from her lofty pinnacle, and was proceeding along the harbour-front with apparent unconcern, carelessly glancing at the railway-trucks, the lorries, and the herring barrels. This is not the part of Duntroone ordinarily chosen by young ladies out for a morning walk; nevertheless she seemed bent on no very precise errand; while there was something of a holiday look about her attire.

Ogilvie, his work finished for the moment, had stepped ashore, and was now standing talking to an acquaintance. When Barbara drew near, he glanced towards her with some little surprise; then he raised his cap; evidently he assumed that she would continue on her way. But when she paused, hesitated, and seemed inclined to address him, he at once dismissed his companion, and turned to her.

"It is some time since," she said, slowly, "it is some time since you have been to see us." Her eyes were downcast, and she was nervously smoothing the forefinger of her glove.

"I have been rather busy," he said, evasively.

"I was thinking," said she, "I was thinking—if there was any reason."

"Oh, nothing particular — nothing particular," he made answer. There was no shyness about him, at all events: he was contentedly scanning the various articles of her costume.

For a second she was silent; then she ventured to raise her eyes, the better to question him.

"Was Allan Henderson — speaking to you?"

At this he laughed rather uneasily.

"Well, yes, we had a few words, by way of a joke. Only the joke might have had a bad ending; for both of us were precious near rolling over the edge of the Castle hill."

"Was there a fight?" she demanded, with breathless eagerness.

"A fight? No. But there was a scrimmage — a ridiculous scrimmage. A fuss about nothing. If I may be allowed to say so, Miss Barbara, I'm afraid your friends are just a little bit too officious!"

There was something of a taunt in this last phrase, notwithstanding the assumed indifference of the speaker. As for her, her cheeks

were burning hot with resentment: her surmises had been only too clearly confirmed.

"Yes," she went on, in bitter indignation, "it is what you say—my friends are a good deal too officious. What right have they to interfere on my account? What right has Allan Henderson to meddle with anything that concerns me? Let him keep to his school. He is not my master. I am not in any of his classes——"

"But, really, really," said he, with abundant goodhumour, "it is not a matter to make any worry about. It is of no consequence one way or the other. It is a trifle——"

"I will not have anyone speaking for me—any one that has not the right to do it," she continued, with the beautiful lucent eyes grown sullen with wrath. "And what was it he said? Yes, I guessed that he was going from me to you—I have been thinking of it—I am sure he would be doing that. And now I want to know what it was he said——"

The Purser smiled tolerantly.

"Don't you bother yourself about nothing, Miss Barbara," said he. "Things are very well as they are: are they not? I for one am perfectly satisfied."

She regarded him boldly.

"If I were a man," said she, "I would not let another man frighten me away from any house."

He winced under this reproach; but all the same he answered her with a sufficiently confident air—

"No, no, Miss Barbara: it isn't that at all. There's not a man in Duntroone, or anywhere else, would keep me away from any house that I wished to visit——"

"Then why——"

"Then why have I not been looking in of late to see you and your folks?" he said, anticipating her question; and then he proceeded, carelessly: "Oh, well, I hate fuss and disturbance. I'm for a quiet life. There's no use in seeking trouble when you can avoid it. It isn't worth while. I don't see the object——"

She appeared to withdraw a little; and her manner changed.

"Oh, of course; I understand," she said stiffly and proudly. "If it is not worth while, why should you come to see us? If there is no object, I can very well understand. And it is much better as it is——"

"Besides, as I tell you, I have been busy,"

he added, with something of apology in his tone.

"Oh, yes, I understand," she said. "I understand very well. And as you say, it is of little consequence. Good morning, Mr. Ogilvie!"

She was for moving away when he intercepted her.

"One moment, Miss Barbara," said he, as if rather deprecating her displeasure. "You have never fixed yet when you are coming for a sail with us. We spoke of it before—your going up to Tobermory—and staying the night with Mrs. Maclean's friends—and coming back with us the next day. The weather appears quite settled at present; and I would see that you were well looked after——"

"I am very much obliged to you," said she, in the same stiff and cold fashion. "But before I could do that, you would have to come and ask permission for me from Mrs. Maclean; and as she lives in a house that you dare not come near, there is no possibility of it."

He flushed red with vexation.

"I can go near any house that I choose to go near," he said, shortly.

"Oh, well, indeed now that is a good

thing," she rejoined, with great coolness. "For it is a pity that any one should be afraid to come near the house of a friend." And with another formal word of farewell, she turned from him and walked away, resolute and apparently unconcerned. She even made a show of opening the small leathern reticule she carried, as if to refresh her memory about her next errand; but her fingers shook so that she could hardly undo the clasp.

Some little time thereafter, on her way home, Barbara called in at the shop to leave a message: and there she found Jessie Maclean talking across the counter to Niall Gorach. When Barbara entered, Jess looked up and laughed.

"Now is your chance, Barbara," said she. "Here is Niall that offers to take me to a wonderful spae-wife——"

"And what is that?" Barbara asked.

"A spae-wife—a wise woman—who will tell you whether you are going to marry a prince or a chimney-sweep. She will tell you everything that is to happen to you, and perhaps something more. Well, now, I have no curiosity about myself; I am content to be as I am; but you—I'm thinking

you might want to know the strange and fine things that are to come your way. Though I am not sure that it is safe, Barbara: you might see too much, and lose your senses——”

Niall was looking from the one to the other of them. At last he said to Jess—

“It was you that was keeping the man from striking me; and besides I got a suxpence; and I was to show you the white stag in Creannoch. But that is a long weh aweh. Mebbe you would come to the wise woman; and I will see that the policeman is not noticing anything——”

Barbara stared at him and listened, in silence. And without a word—as if this chance proposal were a matter of complete indifference to her—she left the shop. But a few minutes afterwards, when Niall Gorach was going along the street, he found himself overtaken.

“Have you the Gaelic?” said a voice close to him.

“Yes, indeed,” he answered in that tongue, as he turned and beheld Barbara Maclean confronting him: no doubt in his eyes she seemed a grand and noble lady, with her fine hat and feathers.

"Will you take me to the wise woman?" she said, hurriedly.

The half-witted lad regarded her with slow suspicion.

"What you do not do to-day, you will not repent to-morrow: that is what they are always saying to me," he replied.

"But I am Jessie Maclean's cousin, and you are very friendly with her," continued Barbara. "And besides that, I will be giving you something."

Still he hesitated.

"You would have to go after it is dark," said he.

"I will go at any time," she responded eagerly. "Tell me where I am to meet you."

"And you will not be speaking of it to anyone?" he asked of her, with cautious and peering eyes.

"As sure as the Good Being lives, not a word will I pass to any person."

This seemed at length to pacify him; and, after a glance up and down the thoroughfare, he told her when and where she should find him. Then Barbara hurried off home, for Mrs. Maclean would soon be coming over for her mid-day meal. The little widow, when

she did appear, found her niece more pre-occupied and silent even than usual: she did not know that the girl, trembling at her own temerity, had it in mind to lay an impious hand on the veil of the future.

At the appointed hour, when darkness had fallen and the street lamps were lit, Barbara stole out and along to the rendezvous, her finery being now all discarded for a thick tartan plaid which she wore round her head and shoulders, and with which she could pretty effectually conceal her face. Niall was awaiting her.

“Does the woman—does the wise woman—ever do any one harm?” Barbara asked of her companion as they set forth—and she spoke in an undertone.

“You will have to give her money,” was the reply.

“Will you come into the house with me?” she asked again, timidly.

“No. I will be on the outside. And if I see the officer, I will let you have warning. But it is a very secret place, and perhaps they will not be observing anything.”

He led the way towards a back slum in the poorer part of the town; and there, with all sorts of stealthy precautions against being

remarked, he brought her to the mouth of a 'close' or entry, and whispered to her to go in. As for himself, he seemed at the same moment to vanish. Barbara, thus thrown on her own resources, did advance a step or two; but the place was pitch dark; and it is probable that in her vague apprehension she would have retreated and got into the open air again, but that suddenly a hand was laid upon her arm. She shrieked in terror.

"Be quiet—be still—ye're safe enough," said a woman's voice. "I'll show ye the way."

Hardly knowing what was happening to her, she suffered herself to be led by this unknown grasp; she was conducted along a narrow passage; she was warned about the descent of some steps; she found herself in a stone-paved court; and then a door was opened, and presently she knew that she had come into some confined space. The next moment her guide struck a match and proceeded to light a candle; and Barbara, looking around with bewildered eyes, discovered that she was in a low-roofed cellar-looking place that was apparently empty, while her companion turned out to be a little old

woman of slatternly appearance and unkempt grey hair. The ancient witch now shut the door behind them, and fixed the candle on to the wall.

“There will be no one to disturb us,” she said, after a swift and cunning scrutiny of the features of her visitor. “And if anything should appear—there in the middle of the floor—you will mind not to give a cry.”

At these words the figure of the girl began to shiver slightly.

“I am not wishing for anything to appear,” she said, in a low voice.

“Maybe there will no—maybe there will no,” the crone proceeded, as she began to get out the implements of her craft. “But at least I can tell ye some things that’s before you; and that I can do because I have read the Book of the Law; ay, and I have heard the Voice; and open now is all that was shut, and shut is all that was open. Be attentive now—the time is at hand.”

What followed—the palmistry, the divination by cards, and the like—was of the most poor and paltry description; that is to say, the old beldame’s tricks and pretences would have appeared tawdry and commonplace to

a landward-bred girl, who would have regarded them with a mixture of laughing incredulity and curiosity, the incredulity predominating; but Barbara had been brought up in a lonely island, with moaning seas around, and the awful silence of the starlight nights; and her imaginative and impressionable temperament yielded readily to a fear of the supernatural. The gibberish the old woman talked was to her something terrible and strange; the mysterious hints of what was in store for her were communications from the unseen; it needed no caldrons with green flames, nor spectral figures, nor pentagrams with phantom goats to convince her that these blurred glimpses into the future were true. Nay, in her tremulous agitation she almost seemed to think that this revealer of coming events had some power of control over them.

“No, no!—he’s not to be away for so many years!” she exclaimed, piteously. “Don’t say that! He may change his mind. He may find enough attraction at home. Not for years and years——”

“But, as I tell ye, there’s a lady in the ploy,” continued the hag, and she shuffled the dirty bits of pasteboard again, and

affected to be examining them profoundly. "Ay, indeed, a grand lady, and richly dressed. And what is a tartan shawl against a velvet gown?——"

"But I have better than a tartan shawl!" said Barbara, quickly. "I only put on the plaid to hide my face in the street. I have far finer things—it need not be for that he will go away and stay away for years. Is there not enough attraction at home, that he should be going away? What will I do, then, that he is not to go away?"

"But the dark sweetheart—you have been thinking of him as well?" said the withered beldame, watching her prey by the dull light of the solitary candle.

"Him!" said the girl, with unguarded vehemence. "It is nothing but mischief he has been doing, coming between us! No, no, do not tell me about him—do not waste time—tell me about the other one! How many years is he to be away? He will forget all about me!——"

"Well, well, now," said the ferret-eyed old woman, insidiously, "but there's the rich old gentleman you have the chance of——"

"I would rather be dead!" Barbara broke in, passionately.

“Ay, ay, but carriages and horses are fine things, and ribbons and satins. You will come to me again now, and bring me a little more money; and I will tell ye about the rich old gentleman, and the estate, and the grand pew in the church——”

“I would rather be dead!—I would rather be dead!” the girl cried—out of her mind with this torture of hopes and fears. “Tell me about the other one—about the fair one: how many years is he to be away?—and maybe he will not go if he finds enough attraction at home? What is it that will keep him? What am I to do? Are you sure that he is going? He never said that to me. Only that he was not satisfied, as many a young man is not satisfied, and wishing for better opportunities——”

There was a tapping at the door. The old witch instantly blew out the light.

“There’s a policeman at the corner,” Niall Gorach whispered in to them, in Gaelic, “and it is I that am thinking he is on the watch for us. Well, now, if he comes here, as soon as he puts his foot on the steps, I will trip him up; and you must run——”

“No, no!” exclaimed Barbara, in still further alarm. “I cannot do that. Every

one will know. Will I give him money?— I have still a little——”

“Give it to me!” said the beldame, eagerly. “Give it to me—and I will make him quiet——”

“May the devil eat you!” growled Niall Gorach, using a familiar Gaelic imprecation. “If you take another penny of her money, it is I that will make your life too hard to be borne. I will put more wild beasts into your house than you ever saw in a pack of cards. Now be still—and maybe the officer will go by.”

They stood silent and unseen by each other in the dark, Barbara hardly daring to breathe. And then, after a little while, Niall Gorach crept away from the cellar, and ascended the steps, and passed out to the front: he returned with the welcome intelligence that the coast was clear—Barbara was free to go. A second or two thereafter the shawled figure was again passing swiftly along the thoroughfare—her face concealed from the light of the lamps—and many a wild fancy claiming possession of her brain.

CHAPTER X.

THE RED PARASOL.

“ I AM of opeenion,” said the councillor, seated in Mrs. Maclean’s back-parlour, and giving himself considerable airs before the women-folk, “ I am of opeenion that in human life there’s a great deal to be done with imagination. For example, now, when I want to go to sleep at night—and if there’s a grander thing in the world than a sound night’s rest, I don’t know where you’ll find it—when I want to get to sleep, I double up the pillow to give a rounded edge to it, and then I put my cheek quietly and softly on it, and then I try to imagine that my head is a golf ball placed on the tee : not a ball among prickly whins, nor a ball in a cart-rut, nor a ball in a puddle o’ water, but a ball carefully and gently and securely placed on the tee—— ”

“Ay,” said Jess, “and do ye never dream that it’s sent whirling into the air with one o’ they heavy clubs?”

“Na, na,” he responded, slily. “By the time it comes to dreaming I’m dreaming of something quite different. It’s the getting to sleep is the question, and that’s where imagination steps in, and does the trick. Talking of golf-balls,” he went on, “the new links are nearly completed; and when they’re open, Miss Jessie, I want you and Miss Barbara to come and look on at another match between me and Jamie Gilmour. Ye see, I had rather bad luck the last time——” He stopped; and then proceeded again, with a sudden burst of honesty: “No, I’ll not say that. I will not say that. If a man can beat me at golf, he can beat me; and there’s an end of it. I cannot do better than my best. Dod bless me, I see people worrying and worrying because they’re not equal to their neighbours! there’s no philosophy in that—no philosophy——”

“I’m sure, Mr. McFadyen,” observed the polite little widow, “there’s few can beat ye at golf, or at anything else.”

“Well,” said the councillor, modestly, “I’m not saying but that I try to keep myself up

to the mark. And maybe I'll show Jamie something on the new links. I've been over the ground. I've been studying the bunkers. I think I can see my way to make a fight of it—if Gilmour does not put me out wi' that cackling laugh of his—— ”

At this point Barbara made her appearance, and he instantly jumped to his feet to shake hands with her and to pull in a chair for her.

“I thought I saw you this morning,” he said, with adroit flattery, “for there was a young lady going down the street before me that had a very elegant figure and was nicely dressed, and thinks I to myself ‘If that's not Miss Barbara, I'm a Dutchman!’ But when I got nearer I discovered who she was—it was one of the Miss Murrays of Inveruran—the younger daughter, I think—— ”

Barbara's face flushed with pleasure: the Murrays of Inveruran were great people in those parts, the ladies of the family being quite the leaders of fashion.

“It was her red parasol that had hidden her face,” explained the councillor. “And I will say this,” he continued, with an air of conviction, “that any young lady that carries a scarlet parasol does nothing more nor less than confer a favour on every one coming

within sight of her. And I will just explain to ye now why a red parasol should be such a beautiful thing, and grateful to the eye. What is the general colour of the earth? It's green. And what is the complementary colour of green? It's red. And that's the reason of the harmony—that's why the eye welcomes it—Dod, I tell ye that a brilliant red parasol, on the dullest day ye like, looks to me just like a blaze o' summer, though the young lady may be only standing on the pavement and looking in at McLennan's windows."

Barbara had been listening intently—in silence; but the widow said—

"It's very clever of you, Mr. McFadyen, to understand the meaning of such things."

"No, no," he responded, with some touch of deprecation, "only there's a why and a wherefore to everything, and one is none the worse for being aware of it."

It was a few days after this that Barbara was again waiting and watching for the *Aros Castle*—this time from the rocky promontory underneath the Gallows Hill. In addition to her ordinary attire, she had a shawl hanging over her arm, though the warmth of early summer was now in the air;

while there could be little fear of rain on such a morning, for sea and sky were alike of a faultless blue, while the hills of Mull and Morven and Kingairloch had that peculiar remoteness and aerial quality that tells of settled fine weather. And it was into this world of shining azure that the red speck of a funnel eventually and slowly made its way; until, as the ship drew nearer and nearer, the throb of her paddles could be heard, echoing up among the ruins of Duntroone Castle. Then she churned her way across the smooth waters of the harbour; she was made fast alongside the quay; and the work of discharging passengers and cargo began.

Barbara lingered and still lingered out on the rocks; and when anyone chanced to pass—for there was a boatbuilder's shed down at the shore—she would leisurely walk a few steps one way or another, as though she were entirely engrossed with the seaward view. But by-and-bye she turned her back on that brilliant picture; she left the rocks; she went along by the fishermen's cottages; and now before her was the South Pier, with the *Aros Castle* lying idle, though there were still a few stragglers busy amongst the

landed cargo. At this point she paused for a moment to take out something from under the folded shawl. It was a scarlet sunshade; and when she had opened it and raised it over her head, very fine it looked, for the sharp black rays of the framework only made the translucency of the silk more apparent, and there was a soft rose-red glow under this splendid canopy. Perhaps her eyes were a little timid as she went forward again; but she could lower the sunshade an inch or two and screen herself from observation if she chose. And in this wise she approached the *Aros Castle*.

There was little doing on board the steamer, the train not yet having come in: the Captain was seated near the bridge, smoking his pipe, while the Purser was standing by, with a bundle of papers in his hand. But Ogilvie, at the moment, was not looking at these papers; and it is quite certain that as Barbara approached, his attention must have been drawn to such a conspicuous object as a scarlet sunshade—conspicuous among the squalor of a quay. Moreover, if he had been in the mind to intercept her, even in the way of ordinary friendliness, a couple of seconds would have brought him to the landward end

of the gangway. And yet he made no sign ; while she on her part, apparently taking no heed of his discourtesy, passed on, the proud elegance of her gait losing nothing of its accent.

“ Who’s that flaunting her feathers at ye, Jack ? ” the Captain said, with a glance after her.

“ That was one of the Maclean girls,” he answered, carelessly.

But of a sudden Barbara turned ; she came deliberately back to the steamer ; and of course, as soon as he saw her put her foot on the gangway, he stepped forward to meet her.

“ Are you going over to the North Pier soon ? ” she asked, somewhat stiffly.

“ Not very long now,” he answered her ; “ the train is nearly due.”

“ I am tired—I have been for a long walk,” she said.

“ Then you could not do better than let us take you across,” said he ; and he went and fetched a camp-stool for her. The Captain, a taciturn man, put his pipe in his waistcoat pocket, and got up and walked away, his hands behind his back.

She hardly knew what to do or say.

Sullen and wrathful as she was over his indifference, she yet feared to widen the breach between them.

"I suppose you have more and more people coming every day," she said.

"Oh, yes, the season has well begun now," he answered her. "The fine weather brings out the tourists like horse-flies."

"You need not quarrel with what gets you your living," she said, again.

"It's a pretty poor living," he rejoined—but he was looking away towards the station, into which the train had just slowly crept.

"And I suppose," she continued, with just the suspicion of a taunt, "that you are kept as busy during the evenings as during the day?"

"One has got to work," he said. And then he glanced at her costume, and the splendour of the rose-red parasol. "You are better off. You can take your holidays when you like."

"I would not be a slave at all hours," she retorted. "I would not be a slave for any one."

"You are lucky," he said. "Some of us have got to be slaves." And with that he left her, and went to the head of the gangway;

for the first of the hotel-omnibuses had just arrived, and the people were descending.

She did not have further talk with him for some time; she could only sit patiently and follow him with her eyes, especially noting his demeanour towards the young ladies and their mammas who came on board. He himself had half-jestingly complained of their treatment of him—that at the very most they would throw him a word of civility as they would throw a bone to a dog; but Barbara's observation did not tell her that such was the case; he seemed to be known to many; and the greetings that were exchanged, as this one or that came along and stepped on to the deck, were quite sufficiently pleasant and friendly. And why would he not smile in that fashion upon her? The beams of the sun-god could so easily have dissipated her anger!

She waited and waited, and still he did not return to her. The steamer's bell was rung a third time; there was a brief interval; a last passenger or two came running; and then the gangway was withdrawn, the captain signalled down to the engine-room, and the paddle-wheels began to revolve. There remained now but the breadth of Duntroone

Bay—so short a space for speech! With feverish impatience she watched him go hither and thither; and apparently he had no great business on hand; for eventually he stood idly chatting and laughing with a man she knew very well by sight—the chief draper in Duntroone. Nay, his neglect of her seemed intentional—an open insult; she already saw herself leave the boat in proud silence, with a bitter resolve that henceforth they should be absolute strangers to each other. And indeed it was not until the very last minute, as the steamer was nearing the North Pier, that he came quickly along to her and said:

“Well, now, Miss Barbara, I’m very glad we had the chance of bringing you across; and you must make use of the steamer whenever you are over on the other side. And remember me to your aunt and Miss Jessie—Jessie the Flower of Duntroone, as Mr. McFadyen would say.”

He spoke in his usual free and off-hand fashion; and her keen mortification and resentment, that had been longing for expression in some indignant act or look, got all blunted and subdued and dispelled.

“I hope you will come in some evening

and see them," she said, as she stepped on to the gangway—and for a moment her eyes did seek his with some timid appeal.

"Oh, yes, yes," he answered her, good-naturedly enough; and then she passed along, and got ashore, and was lost in the crowd. She did not stay to look at the departing steamer. She hurriedly shut up the red sunshade, and carefully hid it under the shawl hanging over her arm; and, thus shorn of her glory, she left the quay and made her way home.

That same evening Mrs. Maclean, Jess, and Barbara, the varied toil of the day over, were seated at their frugal meal; and the widow was talking in an unusually concerned and anxious manner. It appeared that some time during the afternoon, on her way to the shipping office to pay freights, she had chanced to meet Allan Henderson; and she had been greatly struck by the serious change in his looks; he seemed ill, and careworn, and depressed, though he would not admit that anything was wrong.

"And I feel kind of responsible for the lad," she continued, "for we are all the kith and kin he has near him. But he's that stubborn; he'll not take advice; he thinks

he can do anything with his constitution—that has served him well so far, I admit; but how long is it going to stand out against careless treatment and overwork? I'm sure I hope the warning has not come now—poor lad, my heart was sore to see him; but would he say there was anything wrong?—not a bit!—he only laughed and declared he had no time to imagine himself an invalid. It was not a happy kind of a laugh either—there's something on the lad's mind; that I'm convinced of——”

“Mother,” said Jess, “if he is looking so ill, don't you think we could send Dr. McGillivray—Allan could not well refuse to see him——”

“But he would—he would,” the little widow rejoined. “I just begged and prayed him to insult a doctor—if only to save us from anxiety; but as I tell ye, he's that stubborn; and he thinks he's made of cast-iron. And a more perneecious idea cannot get hold of a young man.”

She paused for a moment or two; and then resumed, in a more cheerful tone—

“Well, for another reason I was pleased to meet the lad, and glad to find him just as simple and honest and straight-spoken as

ever. He has not been near us for a while now; and I was rather wondering whether his college-learning and his classes might not be beginning to make him a little set up, so that he would not care about being seen coming into a tobacco shop and sitting down among friends there——”

“It’s little you know Allan,” said Jess, proudly, “if you could suspect him of any such thing!”

“Ah, but there’s curious ideas get into the minds of young folks,” said the widow, shaking her head. Then she added pointedly: “And I would ask you this, Jess; supposing that Allan was ever to give himself airs like that, who would be accountable for it?—who but you yourself? Who but you—talking of the great things he’s to look forward to, and setting him on, and making so much of him? Many’s the time I’ve watched him with his great eyes glowering into the fire, while you were telling him of this one and the other that had gone away to London and become famous; and was it not you yourself, Jessie—and that not so long ago either—was it not you yourself that was saying there would come a day when we would be wondering that Allan Henderson ever used

to come into our parlour, and sit down and chat with us, and smoke his pipe ? ”

But Jess was in nowise abashed.

“ And if I did ? ” she replied promptly. “ That is saying one thing. But it is quite a different thing to suppose that Allan would ever show himself ashamed of us, no, not if he were coming back from dining with the Queen at Windsor Castle. It is not in his nature to be like that ; he would not understand it ; he is too thorough through and through ; meanness and pretence of that kind he simply could not comprehend. You might as well—— ”

“ Ay, Jess,” her mother interposed, drily, “ you’ve aye got a fair word for Allan behind his back ; it’s a pity you’re not more civil to him before his face.”

To which there was no reply ; for now supper was over ; Mrs. Maclean took up the *Duntroone Times and Telegraph*, to read the news from the outer isles ; the girl Christina was called in to clear the table ; while Jess went away to her own room to fetch some piece of dress that she wished to mend. Barbara sate down and began to plait a collar for a kitten that had recently been presented to her.

It was a quiet evening and apparently uneventful; and yet something strange occurred, under that placid surface. Jess Maclean was away for a considerable time before she returned with the garment she had been seeking; and when she appeared at the door again, she said, in accents of surprise—

“Barbara, where did you get that red sunshade? I could not find my pelisse, and I thought it might have been put into your drawer——”

Barbara had started to her feet, her face betraying the most vivid alarm; and instantly she stepped across the room before Jess could add another word. Indeed, so quick were her movements, and so deeply was Mrs. Maclean engrossed with her newspaper, that the widow, who had not chanced to overhear Jessie’s question, did not even now notice that both girls had disappeared. Barbara dragged her cousin into the adjacent room.

“I am not wishing your mother to know,” she said, in the greatest confusion; and she went hurriedly to the drawer, and opened it, and proceeded to securely cover over the sunshade, which was down at the bottom.

Jess was astonished beyond measure.

"I am sure, Barbara," she said, "I did not intend to pry into any secret. But I thought my pelisse might be there. And how do you think my mother is not to know?—she will see you carrying the sunshade when you go out."

"No, no," said Barbara, who seemed terrified. "I can hide it—perhaps I will not use it often——"

"Why," said Jess, goodnaturedly, "you would not have such a fine thing as that, and keep it locked up in a drawer? What did it cost you, Barbara?"

The eyes of the girl looked frightened and bewildered.

"The cost?" she repeated, "the cost—it was fifteen shillings."

"Well, that is a good deal of money——"

"No, it was twelve shillings," Barbara broke in, in a breathless kind of way. "I have not paid for it yet—it is to-morrow that I am to pay for it—the twelve shillings."

"And even that," said Jess, laughing—though she was still unable to account for her cousin's confusion and distress—"even that is a good deal to pay for something you mean to keep locked up in a drawer. It is not a good investment, Barbara. I think

you would be better with the money. A sunshade is not quite the right thing to lay up for a rainy day, is it ? ”

“ But you will not tell your mother, Jessie ? ” Barbara demanded quickly.

“ Oh, no,” Jess responded. “ If it is a secret, it is a secret. But I do not understand why you should have bought such an expensive thing, only to cover it up in a drawer. Barbara, you are a spendthrift—that is what you are.”

“ Do not speak of it to any one, Jessie,” the girl said, in a low voice. “ There is no use in speaking of it.”

And with that she lowered the gas, and the two girls returned to the parlour and to their respective occupations : Barbara silent and constrained—Jess, though without any deep pondering on the subject, remaining somewhat puzzled.

CHAPTER XI.

A HALF-HOLIDAY AND THEREAFTER.

WHEN at length the new links were completed and thrown open to the members of the Golfing Club, the councillor and the station-master managed to secure a vacant couple of hours for their long-talked-of match; while Mrs. Gilmour and Jess Maclean—Barbara having declined—had been persuaded to accompany them, to spur them on to honourable emulation. And auspicious and exhilarating was the morning on which they left the town and climbed away up to the breezy heights on which the greens and the teeing-grounds had been carefully planned out; the surrounding undulations of larch-wood were stirring, and yet no more than stirring, in the soft summer air; the peaks of Ben Cruachan, clear to the top, were of

a faint and transparent azure in the luminous silver skies. Peter of course rose to such an occasion; he was emphatically insisting on the value of physical exercise; he made merry jests at the expense of the tall, grim, red-haired station-master; he playfully wanted to know what reward the fair spectators had in store for the victor in the contest. Nay, as now falls to be related, his high spirits eventually got the better of him, and landed him in a predicament the like of which it is to be hoped no golfer had ever before encountered.

For Mr. McFadyen had been over the links, whereas the station-master had not; and accordingly, when they had secured the services of a caddie, the councillor undertook to lead the way and show his friendly enemy the whereabouts of the holes. His first drive was an excellent one.

"That's something like, now—if you keep that up you'll do," Gilmour cried, encouragingly—though the remark seemed rather to reflect on previous performances.

"I'll bet ye half-a-crown on this hole!" interposed the councillor, in a taunting fashion.

"Away wi' your half-crowns!" the other

said with contempt. "It would be wiser-like if ye'd walk on, and keep an eye on my ball."

This Peter proceeded to do, though with what secret thoughts—whether of mere devilment or of deliberate revenge—will probably never be known. He went away forward and got on to the top of a knoll; with word and gesture he indicated the whereabouts of the green; and then he waited for the station-master's drive. This also was an excellent one; the ball came sailing and sailing along, triumphantly clearing a wide extent of rushy ground that might have proved a formidable hazard; until finally, out of sight of everybody but the councillor, it landed in a slight hollow, fair on the way to the hole. What followed was remarkable. Mr. McFadyen, instead of remaining by his own ball and waiting until the others came up, now walked quickly across to where the station-master's ball had fallen; he picked up that small white sphere, and slipped it into his pocket; and when his companions arrived, he was diligently striking with his club at patches of ragwort, and hunting all about.

"Dod," said he, seriously, "I could ha'

sworn your ball fell just here, Jamie—it must be in the weeds somewhere—it's just extraordinary how a ball gets covered sometimes—and the next day you'll find it easily enough—lying in the open——”

They were all looking about now—the station-master inclined to be angry at this unexpected check.

“Ye might have kept an eye on it, man!” he said to the councillor.

“But I did!” retorted Peter. “I tell ye I saw it fall just about here——”

“Ay, and did ye observe the earth open and swallow it up?” demanded the long, thin, fiery-headed man, peevishly. “A fine one you are to keep an eye on a ball!”

“You'd better find it anyway,” remarked Peter, with great composure, “or the hole's mine.”

They could not find the ball; they pried and prodded; they kicked at the little clumps of ragwort; they pressed their foot on the long grass. And meanwhile the councillor was jeering.

“Jamie, my man, if ye lose five minutes for every drive ye make, it's little ye'll see of the twelve-twenty train the day.”

“I give ye the hole,” the station-master

said snappishly. "Let's get on to the next teeing-ground."

And again the small group moved on—Jess openly sympathizing with the station-master over his misfortune. For she could not but observe that there was about Mr. McFadyen a look of mysteriously reticent diversion; he did not say anything, but his eyes were covertly amused and laughing; while his face remained portentously grave. She did not think it becoming that he should inwardly rejoice over the misadventure of a lost ball.

They reached the next teeing-ground, and here Peter gave his antagonist general directions as to the lie of the second hole, betwixt which and them ran at right angles a considerably high stone wall. Clearly the object of the opening drive was to get well over this dangerous obstruction; and the councillor, having the 'honour,' got away in capital style.

"Ye're doing fine, Mr. McFadyen," said the station-master's wife, approvingly—and unmindful of her husband's morose looks.

"Sometimes I'm better than at other times," the councillor responded, modestly. And then he gave a sharp little snort of a giggle, without apparent cause.

It was now Gilmour's turn; and it was obvious that he meant to secure this next hole, or perish in the attempt. He was most cautious about the tee; he patted down the ground behind it; he took a long look forward; he raised his club slowly, and then down it came with a slashing 'swipe'; away went the ball in a beautiful curve, the size of it dwindling and dwindling, until it disappeared.

"You're no over, Jamie," remarked the councillor.

"Not over?" the station-master rejoined angrily. "I'm over, and halfway up the other side."

"You're no over," repeated Peter, with confidence; and again they moved forward.

Now for the convenience of players and their friends the constructors of the links had placed a flight of wooden steps on each side of the wall; and this little party of four were just about to ascend and descend when the unspeakable councillor, taking from his pocket the ball (the station-master's) which he had previously picked up, managed to drop it unseen, and that close in to the foot of the stone dyke.

"Here, Jamie, man," he called to his foe.

“Here ye are. Did not I tell ye ye did not get over?”

The station-master turned and stared. There certainly was a ball lying there.

“God bless me!” he exclaimed. “I would have bet a hundred pounds I was over, and well over. Did ye not think I was well over, Miss Jessie?”

“Indeed, then, I did,” answered Jess.

“My fine chappie, that’s all the length ye’ve got,” the councillor maintained. “Take up the ball and look.”

There could be no doubt about it; for whereas Mr. McFadyen, being in such matters of an economical turn of mind, was in the habit of using re-made balls, Gilmour was extravagant enough to treat himself to the genuine Silvertown.

“I never saw the like—I could have bet a thousand pounds I was well over!” the mortified station-master exclaimed again. “Well, I must try to get the brute over somehow.”

Alas! his efforts in this direction were a series of ghastly failures; his score mounted up dreadfully; while Peter McFadyen, throwing all decency to the winds, abandoned himself to shrieks and roars of hysterical

laughter. It was a disgraceful exhibition ; for the oftener Gilmour's ball struck the dyke, rebounding on the hither side, the more incontinent became Peter's mirth ; his doubled-up frame shook with his wild guffaws ; he dashed the fist of one hand into the palm of the other ; tears were running down his cheeks.

"Oh, Jamie, Jamie," he cried, "if ye hammer long enough, ye'll have the wall down ; but over it ye'll not get this day."

Nevertheless the incensed and savage station-master did at length succeed in surmounting this hateful obstacle ; and then it was that the councillor, getting over the dyke, forged rapidly on ahead. Apparently he was looking for his ball ; and one ball he certainly did find—a ball that he swiftly and furtively slipped into his pocket ; then he continued his search, until he joyfully called out—

"Yes, here I am. Where are you, Jamie ?"

"I may as well give up this hole too," said the station-master, gloomily.

"No, no, never say die !" rejoined the councillor, in whose twinkling eyes there was still a dark and inscrutable merriment.

"Maybe you'll beat me on the green after all."

"Beat you on the green—when I'm nine already!" the station-master growled. Indeed he had no chance at all; for as it turned out, the councillor got on to the green with his next stroke; and by a perfectly marvellous 'put' holed out in three. The station-master's wife and Jess were unstinted in their applause.

And now it was that the victorious McFadyen found himself in the predicament which was the natural and fitting requital of his infamy. It is quite possible that he had intended confessing the double trick he had so shamefully played on the station-master, and proposing that they should go back and start fair from the beginning; but now—now that he had won the second hole in three—now that he had received the congratulations of the spectators—now that there was a chance of his making a splendid score—the temptation to silence was terrible. The only point was—Had the sharp-eyed caddie noticed his picking up Gilmour's ball, and his subsequently depositing it at the foot of the dyke? Would the imp go away among his fellows and tell the tale? Would

they talk amongst themselves about the 'cheating man'—and perhaps, some day, reveal the story to one of the members? These were wild and whirling thoughts; and yet there was no time for deliberation; Peter had again to lead off; and his companions were already on the teeing-ground. The councillor went forward and took up his position; the caddie made a tee for him and carefully placed the ball; the spectators were all attention. And even now, at this last moment, if he had made a bad stroke, he would probably have owned up, and insisted on beginning all over again; but unfortunately he led off with a magnificent drive; to sacrifice such a fascinating chance of the third hole would be too heartrending; without a word—just as if everything had been fair, square, and aboveboard—he waited for the station-master to follow. And this third hole also Peter won easily.

"Well, indeed, Mr. McFadyen," said Jessie, "you are carrying everything before you to-day. I think you must have been concealing your skill all this time."

He glanced at her quickly and nervously; but there was no guile in Jess's honest grey eyes.

“Oh, I know something of the game,” said he; “I admit I know a little of the game—but I’m not always at my best.”

The strange thing was that although success continued to reward his efforts, and that in quite a remarkable manner, his spirits did not rise in proportion; there was no more wild laughter over Gilmour’s disappointment; there was no bravado on the putting-green. Occasionally, when his triumphant career was winning general approval, he would turn suddenly and scan the face of the caddie; but that phlegmatic youth returned no answering glance; if he had seen that which he ought not to have seen, he made no sign. And so the game went on; and fortune all the way through favoured the unjust; Gilmour was hopelessly beaten; Peter was the hero of the hour—though he bore his honours with unusual modesty.

When at length they reached the little wooden shanty belonging to the Club, Gilmour, his wife, and Jess remained outside, while the caddie went inside to hang up the bags. Mr. McFadyen, observing the opportunity, slipped in after him.

“Well, my lad,” said he, in an offhand and merry way—and he pretended to be tightening

up a leather strap, "that was a fine trick, wasn't it?"

The eyes of the youth answered with a blank stare, which so far was a comforting thing. But Peter was determined to make sure.

"A good joke, wasn't it—at the two first holes?" said he, encouragingly.

And again there was a blank stare: no hideous and self-conscious grin. A heavy weight seemed to be removing itself from Peter's sinful soul.

"Why, don't ye remember," he said, with quite blithe hypocrisy, "don't ye remember the hash Mr. Gilmour made of it at the dyke? A great joke that was: I'll be bound ye don't often see such an angry man. Well, here's an extra shilling for ye: ye need not say anything about it, for it's against the rules; but a discreet tongue is just the best thing a decent, quiet, sensible laddie like you can have."

And therewith he went out and rejoined his companions; and as they walked away across the heights and down towards the town, the chubby and cheerful councillor was more like his natural self. At times, indeed, a thoughtful shade would come over

his face—perhaps the small, still voice was reminding him how he had basely deceived these trusting friends; but then again the glory of being the conqueror—the delight of having so thoroughly routed the station-master—the sweet praises from smiling lips—all combined to stifle his conscience, until he appeared actually to rejoice in his iniquity. When finally they parted to go their several ways, Peter was laughing without and within: never had he seen Jamie Gilmour so completely crestfallen.

It was seldom at this busy time of the year that Jess Maclean allowed herself the luxury of even a half-holiday; and to make up for the morning on the links she was devoting the evening to her account-books, when a tapping at the parlour door announced a visitor. She looked up. It was the school-master. But the sunlight that leapt into her face—and especially into her eyes—at the mere sight of him, soon vanished when she heard his news.

“It’s a great chance for me,” he said, in an absent kind of way, when he had explained the offer of a travelling-tutorship that had been made him: “and I owe it to the

kindness of Professor Menzies, who was always very friendly towards me when I was in Glasgow. Two years of European travel—all expenses paid—and a handsome salary besides : I never could have dreamed of such a chance. And the young gentleman, I am told, is a most modest, good-natured, well-mannered lad——”

“Oh, as for that,” said Jess, who, even in her dismay at the prospect of this long separation, could not forego her gibes, “as for that, if there is to be any bear-leading I know which of you will be the bear.”

“No, I never dreamed of such a chance,” he went on, “when I was cutting out pictures of the capitals of Europe, and pasting them in a scrap-book, and wondering whether my small savings and a few weeks’ holiday would ever carry me to those places. Of course, there will be the giving up of my classes ; and that will be a sacrifice ; for I am interested in many of the lads—their eagerness, their determination, is something fine——” He stopped short. “I beg your pardon, Mrs. Maclean,” he said, humbly, “for bothering you about my poor affairs—they’re of little enough concern to any one——”

“Allan Henderson, I wonder to hear ye !”

exclaimed the little widow; and then she proceeded, with considerable warmth: "Concern? I should think they were of very near concern to us. And what is this you are talking of now but two years' banishment—nothing but two years' banishment—away among a lot of heathens, with their concerts and dancing and theatres on the blessed Sabbath-day. I'm thinking it would be sensibler-like of you to stay among your own folk, and wi' your own kith and kin; and be thankful for the opportunities. But well I know," she continued, with an indignant look towards her daughter, "well I know who is driving you to this. It's none but Jess there, that has her head filled wi' flighty notions, and will not let things be, but would have ye go away among strangers——"

"Mother!" said Jess, in protest—and tears sprang to her eyes. "If ever I said—that Allan should go away from among us—at least—it was with no thought or wish that harm should come to him——"

She was not a very emotional young woman; but at this point she did break down somewhat; and to hide her shame and distress she rose quickly and went away from the room. When Allan, after a few minutes

more of talk with the widow, bade her good-night and passed into the front shop, he found Jess sitting there, shy, embarrassed, and silent.

"Indeed, Jessie," said he, "I'm very sorry you should have been hurt. Your mother did not mean anything. And if I am going away, you know very well what it is that is driving me away."

She looked up—the grey eyes timid.

"I can see there is no hope for me now," he went on, in a sombre kind of fashion. "If I were a rich man, it might be different. Have you noticed that about Barbara, Jessie?—how easily her fancy is captivated by a pretty thing—some piece of dress—some article of display. If it is a weakness, it is only a harmless and childish weakness: it is not very blameable. A beautiful creature like that must know that people like to look at her; and it is but natural for her to think of adornment; it is but natural she should wish to be admired. And if I were a rich man, perhaps I could please her that way; gratitude is very near to affection; perhaps I could win her regard that way. But as it is——"

He did not finish the sentence. She was looking at him strangely and wistfully.

“And are you really leaving us, Allan—and for two long years?”

“I cannot remain in this town,” he answered her. “It has become an absolute hell to me—an inconceivable and unceasing torture. I must get away—and here is such a chance as I never could have hoped for. But in two years’ time, Jessie,” he continued, heartening himself up somewhat, “one will have forgotten a great deal; and when I come back to Duntroone, the very first thing I will do will be to come in here, and ask for you, and report myself sane. And this I know well, that I shall find you just as friendly and kindly as ever, just as unselfish and generous as ever. For it is not necessary that in two years’ time one should forget everything; and that is what I am not likely to forget—your gentleness, and your goodness, and your toleration of a thrawn and thankless wretch.”

Her face brightened and flushed with pleasure: it was rarely that he spoke out in such a fashion. And she had it in mind to ask him if she might write to him and give him the Duntroone news when he was away in the great and busy capitals; but at this moment a customer entered the shop;

whereupon Allan shook hands with her, and bade her good-night and took his leave. On his homeward way his heart was not quite so heavy : a chat with Jess——even when she was in a spiteful mood——was a reassuring, inspiriting sort of thing ; and he could not but be grateful to her for the solicitude and the well-wishing so clearly visible in her kindly grey eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ASSIGNATION.

EVENTS were now clearly marching on to a climax, if not to a catastrophe; though these various personages, occupied with the pressing and immediate demands of everyday life, may not themselves have perceived it. Barbara had most time for reflection, if that could be called reflection that was more like the frantic struggling of some wild animal with an environing net. And it was in these dark hours of reverie, with their clinging hopes, their piteous longings, and sometimes their bitter and fierce resentment, that she at length arrived at a definite resolve: she would remain in this anguish of doubt no longer; she would force the hand of fate, let come what might. As it

chanced, the opportunity was soon enough to present itself.

For there now appeared in Duntroone a certain Mr. and Mrs. McKechnie, who were in some distant way related to the Macleans. Mr. McKechnie was a manufacturer of aerated-waters in Greenock, a well-to-do man, and a person of consequence in the eyes of the widow ; and when the McKechnies came along to the tobacconist's shop to pay a friendly visit, and to propose that both mother and daughter should dine with them that evening at the Commercial Hotel, the invitation was accepted with alacrity. Then something was said about Barbara—for Mrs. Maclean was ever mindful of her kith and kin ; and the soda-water man at once and generously said that she must also be of the party. So when Jess went across to the house for her mid-day meal, she made sure that Barbara would be highly pleased.

To her astonishment, however, she found that Barbara, as soon as she had ascertained that Mrs. Maclean and Jess were to spend the evening at the Commercial Hotel—Barbara obdurately refused to go, and would not be persuaded.

“ Why,” said Jess, laughing, “ I thought it

was just what would delight you, Barbara ! The chance of seeing the gay world—and of wearing your best things ——”

“I have a lot to do,” said Barbara, hurriedly and confusedly. “And my head is not very well to-day—I would rather stay at home. What hour will it be before you are back, Jessie ? ”

“Oh, well,” said Jess, “Mr. McKechnie thinks a good deal of himself, and he is very fond of talking ; and if he has a private room, and some toddy, he may keep us till half-past ten or eleven.”

“You will not be back before half-past ten anyway ? ” Barbara asked again.

“It is not likely,” said Jess—attaching no weight to the question.

All that afternoon, whatever her duties happened to be, Barbara would from time to time take out from her pocket a scrap of paper and anxiously scrutinise the words scribbled on it. She seemed perturbed and restless ; occasionally she would desist from her tasks altogether, and lapse into profound meditation ; then she would resume her work, with a heavy sigh. Or again she would take out the fragment of paper and tear it up, substituting for it another scrap with

a different message written on it. The finally amended words—carefully transcribed, and folded, and placed in an envelope—were these: ‘Will you meet me to-night at nine o’clock, at the small gate under the Castle hill? I have something of importance to say to you.—Barbara.’

In the evening, Mrs. Maclean and Jess—leaving the girl Christina in charge of the shop—came over to get ready for their dinner-party; and directly after they had left the house, Barbara also stole out. It was a beautiful evening—a golden evening in June; there were plenty of people strolling to and fro, and the quays were still busy; but she paid little heed to what was passing around her until she reached the South Pier. The *Aros Castle* was now coming in; she was already half-way across the bay; the throb of her paddles was repeated in the echoing hollows of the Gallows Hill. Barbara got hold of a small boy who was playing with his companions about one of the wooden sheds.

“Do you know Ogilvie the purser?” she asked of him.

“Ay, fine,” was the prompt reply.

“Will you take this letter to him if I give you a penny?”

“ Ay.”

“ But you’ll make sure that you give it to himself ? ”

“ Ay,” said the urchin—with eager eyes watching for the unusual coin.

He got the letter and the penny ; the *Aros Castle* came slowly in to the quay ; and Barbara, from the corner of the shed, could see that Ogilvie was on the upper deck. But still she waited to satisfy herself of the delivering of the message—waited until the steamer had been made fast—until the passengers had come ashore—until she saw the small boy go along the gangway and give the white envelope into the Purser’s hands. That was enough. She withdrew from her shelter so that she herself could not be perceived ; she hurried round by the harbour ; and when she reached home again, she sank into a chair, and remained there a long time, thinking back as to what she had done. But presently she had to think forward—as the clock on the mantelpiece reminded her troubled and anxious eyes ; and she went away to her room to array herself in her best. As she stood before the mirror her fingers were shaking so that she could hardly hold a pin.

At half-past eight or thereabouts she again left the house, and, taking advantage of such back approaches as were available, she made for the point at which the grounds of Duntroone Castle come nearly up to the last of the gardened villas. Further than this point there is no right of way; but an occasional stranger passing along by the rocks is not much objected to; and it was by the rocks that she now proceeded—before her the sheltered little bay, beyond that the old-fashioned garden beneath the Castle hill, and, towering over all, the ruined keep, dark with its ivy against the splendour of the west. For although the sun had gone down behind the mountains, at this time of the year in those latitudes the marvellous twilights may be said to last almost the night through; and even now, as the solitary figure went along by the shelving beach, there was a glory around her—all the world was aflame with colour. And then as she drew near to the wind-stunted trees at the foot of the Castle Rock, the jet-black stems and sombre foliage served but to increase the brilliancy of the western heavens; these were as a wide sea of clear and luminous steel-grey, with long cloud-islands of pale

rose-purple, whose golden strands looked down upon the unseen horizon. Overhead the skies were of a faint and exquisite azure, flecked here and there with vaporous fragments of saffron hue, that appeared as if they could still behold the sunset fires. And in the east the wooded hills were all aglow.

She opened the small wicket-gate, and stepped in under the dense canopy of leaves; from this shadowed retreat, herself unobserved, she could look back over the way she had come—by the out-jutting rocks, and round the semicircular sweep of the shore. It was a peaceful and secluded scene; there was not a sign of life anywhere; an occasional sound, that spoke of distant human habitation, was softened and remote. But there was another sound, all around her, and especially out towards the west: the mysterious murmur of the moving tides, as if the islands were talking to each other of the coming darkness—the strange clear darkness that would later on melt into the white dawn. As yet there was no token of change. The saffron flakes of cloud were still lambent in the azure vault; the hanging woods, of beech, and ash, and fir, glowed warm above the tranquil waters of the bay.

Surely it was a fitting time and place for a meeting of lovers ; and yet Barbara, gazing across those placid waters, began to tremble at the thought of seeing the single figure she was looking for appear at the verge of the rocks. What she had done she had done in a sort of desperation ; but now, as minute after minute seemed to bring him nearer, she grew more and more vaguely apprehensive ; until at times a wild impulse would seize her to turn and flee away through the woods, and hide herself, and make good her return to Duntroone by some circuitous route. And then again she had already dared so much. And if she were to escape now, and get home in safety, would not to-morrow be but as yesterday—with its agonising consciousness that she could not speak with Ogilvie except on the deck of a crowded steamer, with strangers all around, and himself liable to be called away hither and thither ; whereas here, in this gracious solitude and silence, there would be the charm and magnetism of personal appeal, eyes answering eyes, and speech, no longer cold and conventional, attuned to every varying mood. The anticipation of this meeting made her heart beat violently ; and when her straining eyes

fancied they could detect a dark figure out at the rocky promontory, her whole frame shivered. And yet she held her ground. Her lips were dry; her breathing came and went with difficulty, as if there were some weight on her chest.

Of a sudden she uttered a sharp, half-stifled scream of terror, and wheeled round, for some one had noiselessly and stealthily approached her from behind. It was Niall Gorach. And the moment she recognised who this was, her fear gave way to wrath.

"Is it a weasel you are, that you come stealing through the woods like that?" she said to him, in Gaelic; and the beautiful eyes were now blazing with anger. "What is it you want?"

He regarded her doubtfully.

"I have two rabbits," he said, also in Gaelic, "I have them back there in the bushes."

"Away with you, you imp of mischief!" she said. "Is it I that would be wishing for two rabbits!"

"You could hide them in your dress," said he, in an undertone, and he was intently watching the expression of her face. "They are for the other girl—the one that was kind

to me. You could take them into the town, and give them to her in the shop—no one would see you.”

“Go away—go away at once!” she said, with frowning brows. “It is the game-keeper who will be after you and your rabbits—and the sooner you are in jail the better.”

Niall needed no further word than that. He instantly retreated, by the way he came, disappearing through the trees and bushes; and once more she was alone. But this interruption had at least startled her out of the tremulous, apprehensive, half-hysterical mood that had taken possession of her; she returned to her post of observation with a bolder spirit; she would no longer be afraid if she saw a dark-clad figure appear at the point of the rocks. Nay, it was something quite different that she began to fear; a haunting possibility that had more than once crept into her mind, only to be dismissed with quick alarm and trepidation. And now it would recur with bewildering distinctness. Had he resolved to treat her appeal with scorn? Would he refuse to come near her? Would he revenge himself on her because she had been the innocent cause of some

quarrelling and fighting between him and the schoolmaster?

No, she tried to persuade herself, it was inconceivable; he could not be so merciless and unjust. He would in any case come and hear what she had to say; it was the smallest grace he could accord her; any stranger would do as much. And he had been far from acting the stranger towards her. He had sought her society, and made much of her, and paid her compliments: it was no stranger who had entirely devoted himself to her on the evening of the dance given by the Gaelic Choir. And when she could talk face-to-face with him, here in the happy and favouring twilight, it would be otherwise with them both than on the open passenger-deck of the *Aros Castle*.

Nevertheless, as the time went slowly and remorselessly by, a pitiful yearning arose in her heart. It could not be that he meant to forsake her—that he meant to put this cruel slight upon her! He had misread the hour. He had been detained by friends. Something had happened to hinder him, perhaps even after he had set out. Another minute—another couple of minutes—and he would become visible yonder at the verge of the

rocks, hastening to bring apologies and pacifications. For he was not one to strike a woman—and to strike deep.

The inexorable moments stole on, one after another—though there was little change in this magic world of light and colour; and now that piteous craving and desire had grown to be an aching that seemed bitterer than death itself. If only he would appear in sight—if only he would come along by the shore there, no matter in what mood of impatience, or sarcasm, or even contempt—she would abase herself before him; she would plead for pardon; she would beg for kindness. She knew that she had been stiff-necked, and flighty, and wayward; she had held her head too high; she had taunted him—when he was not to blame. But now, if only he would come to her, she would receive his reproaches with meekness; she would do anything he wished; she would be his abject slave. Let him impose his demands, and she would accede—only, he could not mean to desert her for ever! Had she not humbled herself already, in seeking for this assignation? And life was a pleasant and gay thing for him; he could not wish to stab her to the heart.

She withdrew her eyes from the distant promontory, and in a dazed fashion looked around her, asking what time of the night had arrived. There was no darkness, nor anything approaching to darkness, as yet. The heavens overhead had grown to be of the rarest rose-grey; all the fragments of cloud had disappeared; and through the scarcely-moving leaves of the trees—through the jet-black stems—there gleamed the vivid and burning gold of a crescent moon. And still the creeping tides along the coast murmured and whispered to themselves in the silence; but elsewhere all was still; not the faintest sound came from the unseen Dun-troone. She judged that she had waited there an hour; it must be now ten o'clock.

Then suddenly a strange pallor overspread her features, and her mouth was set hard. She pushed open the small gate in front of her, and passed out into the clear twilight. With head erect—and not looking in the direction of the rocks at all—she continued on her way, along by the wall of the old garden, and round by the curve of the shore. It is true that there were tears in her lashes; but they were tears of rage and mortification; they were not bidden there, nor did they

betoken any weakness or self-pity. Her naturally proud gait had no lassitude in it—though she had been standing under those trees for nigh an hour.

Nay, when Mrs. Maclean and Jess came home, they found Barbara in a mood of most unusual sprightliness and content. She would make tea for them—she would insist on making tea for them, though neither of them wanted it; and as she went about the parlour, she was singing to herself. She had but little of a voice, to be sure; nevertheless, it was well that the girl should be of a light heart; and Mrs. Maclean listened pleased and benignant:

*‘ He gave me ribbons for my neck,
And side-combs for my hair,
He gave me ear-rings for my ears,
With pearl drops rich and rare;
No wonder that I love my lad
That’s sailing the salt sea——’*

“Ay,” said the shrewd little widow, in her kindest manner, “and is that the Purser you are singing about, Barbara?”

Barbara turned round, and stared, as bold as brass.

“The Purser?” she said. “Do you mean Ogilvie—him that Mr. McFadyen was calling

an empty-headed dandy? It would be a strange thing indeed if I was thinking of any one like that ! ”

And she went on with her ministrations, affecting to sing blithely and carelessly. The widow, not understanding what all this meant, did not say a word.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNLIGHT ABROAD.

IT was between eleven and twelve on the forenoon of the following day that the scholars in Allan Henderson's class were aroused from the weariful monotony of their toil by an amazing apparition—for the advent of a stranger at the door of the hall could hardly be accounted less. Head after head was surreptitiously turned until the whole school was covertly staring at this new-comer, who stood there irresolute: the Master alone remained unconscious—he was working out on a slate before him some arithmetical problem, while two or three lads clustered around. A kind of hush of curiosity had fallen upon the dull, grey benches; the apparition of a visitor was an almost unprecedented thing; moreover this visitor was a young woman. So unusual, indeed, was

such an event that no one knew what to do : they waited for the Master himself to find out that a caller was there.

The slate was handed back to its owner ; at the same moment, by some freak of chance, Allan Henderson became aware that the distant doorway framed a human figure ; the next instant his startled vision had told him who this was. At once and hurriedly he quitted the narrow platform, passed down the middle of the room, and went out upon the stone staircase, whither Barbara had retreated as soon as she saw that he was coming. She was rather breathless, but she was trying to look pleased : the bewilderment was all on his side.

“ When will you be leaving the school ? ” she said.

“ At one o’clock,” he answered her—for this was a Saturday.

“ Could you not come away rather earlier—about a quarter to one ? ” she said ; “ I am wishing to speak to you, if it is not too much trouble. My aunt she was telling me you are thinking of going away from this country for two years or the like of that ; and she was saying it was a great pity, to be going away from your own people and your friends ;

and maybe you have not considered it. If you would come for a little walk, when the school is over, then there would be the chance of talking about it—and perhaps you will not go away from your friends——”

For a moment he was speechless : he could hardly believe his senses. Here, in the dusk of the stairway, was a sort of radiant creature ; and the marvel was that her voice, instead of being angry and taunting, was soft and ingratiating ; while her eyes, no longer darting scornful flames, were quite amiable, with a modest and conciliatory appeal in them. She was a trifle excited, it is true ; her sentences were somewhat disconnected ; but there was nothing save goodwill in her aspect. Nay, she seemed anxious he should clearly understand that he had awakened her interest and sympathy ; her looks, timid as they might be, were yet smilingly benignant ; he could not but perceive that her heart was warm and well-intentioned towards him. The schoolmaster forgot his wondering school ; he forgot all the rest of the universe—blinded as he was by those beautiful, appealing, kindly eyes.

“Indeed, I would not have sought to

bother you with my poor affairs," he managed to say, with great embarrassment—when she interrupted him—

"But you can come a little before one?" she asked, quickly.

"Yes, I think I can do that——"

"And I will be waiting for you in front of the railway-station—we could have a little walk round by the shore—and by the Gallows Hill—or anywhere you pleased——"

It was an inconceivable kind of thing; and yet surely he had heard aright? And surely nothing could exceed the friendliness of her manner—if those liquid, clear-shining eyes spoke true?

"I hope you are not vexed with me for interrupting you," she said, and the slight hesitation in her speech, along with its accent, was like music in his ears; "but I am sure it would be a pity if you went away from your own country, without a little consideration. And I will be there, waiting, if it is not too much trouble for you."

"The trouble?" said he—and even now he had not recovered from his stupefaction. "I do not understand why you should concern yourself about me, or about anything that is likely to happen to me. I cannot

understand your kindness. But I will meet you there——”

“And at a quarter to one?” she asked again.

“Yes, as soon as that, I hope,” he answered her. And then, without bidding him good-bye, but with a parting glance and a smile, she turned and left. What further instruction his pupils received that day may have been of any sort: it was little he knew. There was much that was ‘taken for granted’ so as to hurry on; and by a quarter to one he had dismissed his class, and was himself free and in the outer air.

Yet that had been no incorporeal vision—no trick of the brain—no waking day-dream in the midst of the weary hours; for now as he drew rapidly near the railway-station, he could see the actual and living Barbara undoubtedly standing there, just within the door of the ticket-office, where she could occupy herself in watching the passers-by. Moreover, it was also clear that she had made use of the interval to deck herself out very bravely; and did not that mean something too? A wild confusion of joy arose in his heart; he thought of the student’s phrase in ‘Faust’—‘eine Magd im Putz’;

surely it was something more than a mere friendly solicitude about his immediate plans that had led her to array herself so smartly in order to keep this appointment and go for a walk with him? Nay, when she became conscious of his approach, the soft and rare shell-pink of her cheek deepened; it was with a pretty bashfulness that she offered him her hand; and quite naturally and lover-like she set herself by his side to accompany him. They passed out from the railway-station and took their way round by the harbour; but in truth he did not heed which direction they followed: it was enough that some miracle had been wrought—and the world was filled with sunlight.

The strange thing was that, although she had made this tryst with him ostensibly to discuss his future schemes, now that the opportunity had arrived she had not a word to say about them. She was talking to him, it is true, and with unusual eagerness and vivacity; she was addressing him with glances as well as with speech; she was smiling and laughing, and apparently she was greatly delighted to have him for her companion; but all through this light-heartedness and affectation of interest, there

was a forced note. Especially as they drew near to the South Quay—from which the *Aros Castle* was just about to depart—especially then did this half-hysterical merriment become more pronounced—until she hardly seemed to know what she was saying.

“Oh, yes, indeed,” she continued—and never once were her eyes turned in the direction of the steamer—“yes, indeed—about Mr. McFadyen—the poor man must have suffered a great deal—before he was driven to confess. It was to Jessie that he came—and he told her he never meant to cheat—it was only a joke, picking up Mr. Gilmour’s ball—but he was led into it—he was led into it; and they did not notice the trick—and so, when it was too late, he let them think he had won the game fairly.”

“And how long did his conscience slumber?” the schoolmaster asked.

“Never at all—never at all,” said Barbara, laughing and giggling in that curiously excited manner. At this moment they were passing along the quay, close to the shore end of the gangway; and if Barbara scrupulously kept her gaze fixed on the ground or turned towards the face of her companion, Allan Henderson at least was well aware that the

Purser, on the upper deck of the vessel, was staring at them as they went by. "The poor man—I am sorry for him," Barbara went on—and her feverish gaiety sounded far from natural. "It was to Jessie that he came first—to confess—maybe he was not able to sleep at nights for thinking of what he had done—and he was asking Jess whether he ought to tell Mr. Gilmour—or maybe it was enough if he confessed to her——"

"And did she grant him absolution, Barbara? Or did she impose a penance?" asked the schoolmaster, lightly. By this time, behind them, the *Aros Castle* had moved away from the quay, and was now steaming across to the North Pier. Allan could not understand why Barbara had so resolutely ignored the existence of the Purser: perhaps she was really preoccupied with this tale of hers about the dejection of the conscience-stricken councillor. Anyhow, it was as well that the steamer had gone; there would be no fear of interruption now.

But presently, when they had got past the quay and were approaching the Gallows Hill, her mood changed; her demonstrative hilarity vanished; she had nothing further

to tell about the councillor and his remorse ; she seemed rather inclined to be proud, and morose, and petulant.

“I do not understand,” she said, “why you should wish to go away from your own country.”

“It is something to see the world,” he answered her, but with no great enthusiasm : how easy it was for her to say the word that would have held him back !

“The day and the night there,” she continued, “are the same as the day and the night here ; you cannot live more there than you can here. And if it is for money, well, I am hearing from more than one that your classes in the evening are doing fine ; and why should you make such a sacrifice—that is what I hear them asking——”

“Money is not everything,” he made answer. And then he hesitated. He dared not imperil these wonderful new relations that had been so suddenly established. It was so surprising and unaccountable a thing to find himself walking with Barbara in this sweetheart fashion—herself neatly pranked out for the occasion—her eyes and voice betraying at least some measure of amiability towards him—that he dreaded to destroy his

chances by any precipitancy. And yet he said: "There is one that could bid me stay, if she wished."

"And who is that one?" she asked.

They were now ascending the Gallows Hill; and she stooped and picked up a wild-flower—a bit of red campion it was—from the foot of the trees. Without waiting for his answer—if he had intended to answer—she presented him with the fragment of blossom, and said in rather an offhand way—

"Will you wear it? But it is not good enough for to-morrow—you would want something far better for your coat if you were to come along to-morrow, after the church is out, and walk up and down to look at the people. Maybe Jessie and me we would be out too; and it is very nice to see a young man have a flower in his coat."

"I do not care about wearing such things," he said; "but this little gift of yours, Barbara, I can treasure." And therewith he took out his pocket-book, and carefully placed the scrap of weed in it. Nor even now would he speak unguardedly: though the mysterious magnetism of her presence—the fascination of the movement of her dress even—was stealing over him and enthralling his

senses ; and wild indeed were the hopes that were thronging thick into his brain.

Then again, when they had reached the summit of the hill, and gone along and sate down on the circular bench at the foot of the flagstaff—it was a calm and summer-like scene that lay stretched out before them, from Dun-da-gu and the far Glashven in the north round to the silver-grey peaks of Cruachan in the east—then again she said :

“It is very strange that you should be so different from other young men, and your ways so different ; but maybe it is better that you are so busy with your studies and your classes ; for Jessie she is always speaking of the great and proud position you are to have, and I hope soon. Oh, yes, I hope soon ; and it is a fine thing to be ambitious, and have people talk about you——”

“There are other things of perhaps greater importance in human life,” he interposed ; but that was all ; he would not startle her away from him by any passionate appeal : it sufficed that she allowed him to be near her, to be even tremblingly conscious of the touch of her gown, on this morning of marvels.

“Barbara,” he said, presently, “do you remember the night the *Sanda* struck on the

Lady Rock? I was up here that night. It was from here that I saw the white things shoot up into the black sky; and many's the time since then I have thought that they were a sort of message from you to me."

"And what could you be doing up here at such an hour?" said she, indifferently glancing at the wide waters of the bay and the hills.

"Well, I have always been used to going about a good deal by myself," he answered her, in a more absent tone. "There are many matters that a man has to thresh out, and the night is the best time for thinking: the dark is quiet. It is well for you that you have not to face these problems and perplexities. All you have to do is to look beautiful and winning—that is your place in nature—that is enough; and if you add to that the showing a little kindness here and there, then you become of quite inestimable value to the people around you. Look at my own case," he went on, "look at what you have done for me this morning. I hardly cared whether I went away for two years or stayed at home; but if you take any interest in these poor affairs of mine, then it would be very different, then it would be worth

considering. A single word from you—would be enough——”

“Oh, as for that,” she said, somewhat saucily, “I do not know that I could be interfering. My aunt and Jessie would tell you that I was too stupid and ignorant to understand about the ambitions of a young man——”

“There are other hopes of far more importance,” he said, hastily. “Barbara, don’t you understand that you have brought them all back to me again, through your friendliness of this morning? But—but I will not alarm you; that would be a poor return. I will not even ask you to say the word that would keep me in this country.”

“I was only telling you what I was hearing,” she replied, evasively, “that it would be a great sacrifice for you to give up your classes—and your friends would be sorry you went away——”

“And would you be sorry, too, Barbara?” he asked, making bold to regard her.

“I would be like the others, I suppose,” she answered, toying with the black bugles that adorned the front of her dress.

But this maiden coyness did not deceive or discourage him; on the contrary, his heart

was filled with a transport that seemed to demand utterance, in spite of his rigorous self-restraint.

“Barbara,” said he, of a sudden, “I have decided I will not accept the tutorship. I will remain where I am, and get on with my classes, and have a word now and again with one or two friends I care for. And it’s many thanks to you for concerning yourself about such poor trifles.”

She rose.

“I must be going now,” she said.

“But, Barbara,” he protested — for he could not let her return to the town without seeking to secure a continuance of her favour, without bargaining for a repetition of this bewildering and enchanting interview, “you must tell me when I am to see you again.”

“Well, to-morrow, then,” she answered, cheerfully, “if you come along the front, after the churches are out. And I will be looking for some one wearing a very nice flower in his coat, for you must not forget that.”

Nay, so kind was she, and such an interest did she show in his affairs, that, as they walked back into Duntroone together, she even ventured to remonstrate with him about

his costume—which was of a simple, plain, workaday character ; and she hinted that on special occasions, such as the next day's after-church promenade, he ought to dress like the fashionable young men, who on Sundays wore coloured kid gloves and smart neckties, and tall hats. Allan laughed and shook his head ; but all the same he was exceedingly grateful to her for her advice ; indeed, when he had bade farewell to her at the entrance to the house in Campbell Street, and turned to come away again, so overjoyed was he, so happily in love with all the world was he, that a vague and general wish possessed him to give somebody something. And the first person that he chanced to encounter was Niall Gorach.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FOOL'S REVENGE.

NIALL was in a sorry plight. His clothes were dishevelled and smothered with dust; his face was scratched and bruised; and the palms of his hands, and his wrists, which he ruefully regarded from time to time, were torn and bleeding.

“What’s all this now?” said the school-master.

Then the half-witted lad told his tale. He had been outside the town, at the foot of the Dunach hill, when the Melfort coach came along. On the top of it was a certain farmer-youth named Dan Kingarra—that is Dan of the Kingarra farm—with one or two of his companions; and it occurred to this facetious person that he would invite Niall to get up beside them, no doubt for purpose of providing them with sport.

Things appeared to have gone on well enough while they were slowly ascending the hill, and driving along the level summit; but when they were rapidly descending the steep incline on the townward side, the motive of Dan Kingarra's kindness became clear. He would have Niall jump off behind—while the coach was tearing down the hill; and this the poor chap was eventually compelled to do, with the inevitable consequences: he was hurled along the stony highway, face downward, his hands and wrists shot out in vain, while the lout of a farmer, ensconced among his companions, laughed aloud at the merry jest.

"If I had been there," said the schoolmaster, with a flash of flame in his dark eyes, "I'd soon have had that tom-fool head-first into the road. There would have been a second one rolling among the stones."

"Maybe," said Niall, slowly, "maybe something will be coming to him, and before long."

"Well, here is a shilling for you, anyway," the schoolmaster continued, goodnaturedly, "and you can go into the chemist's and get some lint and some ointment for your hands. No," said he, on second thoughts—for had

not this poor lad done him a good turn when he was hopelessly immured in the chasm?—"No; you can keep the shilling; but you'd better come along with me to the doctor, and we'll get the thing done properly for you." And to the doctor's they accordingly went; and there Niall was patched and mended up as well as might be; and presently Allan Henderson was again on his way home—his brain filled with recollections that had little to do with Niall Gorach.

But when Niall was once more his own master he resumed his apparently aimless wanderings, and these in due course of time led him to the neighbourhood of the Kingarra farm, which lay just outside the town. Here he became more circumspect; he crept and slouched along by the side of walls and hedges; and when he came to the iron gate leading into the farm-yard, he hid behind a clump of elder-bushes—which had doubtless been planted there in former days for the confusion of ghosts and evil spirits. From this safe retreat, he could command a view—through the slender spars of the gate—of all that was happening in the large and open square, that was surrounded by the usual buildings and outhouses.

Then a little while thereafter Niall withdrew from his hiding, and cautiously and circuitously returned to Duntroone; and the first place he made for was Long Lauchie's shop. The shoemaker was at work, or pretending to be at work; but there was a confused and yet half-comical look about his eyes, when he glanced up and saw who his visitor was, that seemed to suggest that Lauchlan must have of late been straying from the strait and narrow path. And it was not at all in his usual gloomy tones that he now exclaimed, in Gaelic—

“Is it you, you grandson of the Witch of Endor!—and I am of opinion by the look of you that you have been in the wars!”

Niall answered him in the same tongue:

“Will you be lending me a long piece of cord, Mr. MacIntyre, and a bit of rosin to make it dark?”

“And what devil's cantrip is this now?—and who has been pulling a harrow over you?”

“Will you give me the string?” said the lad with the curious, peering, elfin eyes. “When the woman was here, it was I that frightened her away for you.”

“My hero, do you think I am forgetting?”

said Lauchie, with an inhuman chuckle. "Aw Dyeea, many is the time I have been laughing over that; ay, and waking up in the middle of the night, laughing. Oh, you are the champion of the sorcerers, and no mistake; and I am sure she ran all the way shrieking to Fort William—and swimming over Cowal Ferry and Creran Ferry. And if she was drowned, who will be crying over it?—if she is drowned, she is silent; and a silent woman is a very good thing, that Providence does not always give us. And maybe I will be for letting you have the string, if you will tell me what you are going to do with it, and if you will tell me who has been injuring you."

Thereupon Niall—without whimpering, but with a malignant glitter in his eyes—repeated the story he had related to the schoolmaster, and Lauchlan promptly said—

"Well, it is myself that would like to be giving that fellow a bash on the head. But what about the string now—what about the string, son of my heart?"

"I was up at the farm," said Niall, slowly and darkly. "I was looking at the yard. In the middle of it there is a great barrel to drain the byres and the stables; and the top

of the barrel is even with the ground. If I was to tie the string to the pump, and be hidden somewhere with the other end, then maybe Big Dan would be coming along, and I would pull the string, and trip him——”

“And he would fall into the barrel of wash?” cried Lauchie—and instantly he threw aside his work. “May the Good Being preserve us, but I would walk half round the world to see such a thing as that! Niall, it is your head that has the invention in it. Do not mind them if they say you were not at home when the sense was shared; you have as much sense as many; and it is I that will be laughing when I see Dan Kingarra fall into the wash. Do you know now what colour he will be when he scrambles out? he will be as brown as treacle; and not a curse coming from him, for his mouth will be choking. Aw, the brown man!—Niall, I am going with you to see the brown man!—I would not miss it for the best part of my existence.”

Long Lauchie was softly chuckling and giggling to himself as he set about getting the twine and the rosin; but by the time he was ready to start, he had grown solemn again. He opened a press, and took down

a black bottle and a soda-water bottle ; and the latter he filled from the former.

“ Niall,” said he, “ I will give you advice. Maybe you have not as much wisdom as others ; but I will tell you how you can make up for it ; and what you must do is to keep away from the drink. It is drink that is the ruin of half of them around you ; and if you keep away from it, you will be the equal of many, sense or no sense. For myself now, I was taking a drop or two to-day—the toothache being such a terrible, terrible thing.” He put the soda-water bottle to his lips, and had a long pull ; then, with a sigh of satisfaction, he corked the flask and placed it in his pocket. “ Keep away from the drink, Niall, and there is no fear of you : it is drink that is the scourge and disgrace of this country—a sad, sad thing to think of ! ”

But then again, as they were on their way to Kingarra, on this shining afternoon, his spirits recovered considerably ; and although his toothache seemed to be troubling him at times—and he had to seek the necessary relief—he by-and-bye became quite gay.

“ Niall,” said he—and he was quietly laughing now—“ did you ever behold a brown man ? I am thinking that a brown

man will be a sight to see! Do you not imagine that his pockets will be very wet when he will put his hands into them——”

“Maybe,” said Niall, “maybe he will not be for pushing me off a coach again.”

“Aw, the brown man,” continued Lauchie—and he could not restrain his hilarity—“the brown man!—it is I that will be laughing to see the brown man climb up out of the barrel, and if he will be using bad words, would not you do the same? No, not you, not you, Niall, my son; for there are many things you must avoid; and the two things that you must avoid most of all are the drink and the women. The drink I have told you about; and the women—well, now, my hero, perhaps it is not so bad for you to be a little weak in the head, if that will keep the women away from you. Anything to keep them away from you; for they are the devil’s own children, and no mistake; and I wish he had the lot of them, and would keep them at home with himself. I am not saying,” proceeded Lauchlan, “that you may not find one here and there that is pleasing to look at—so long as you do not marry her; it is the marrying that is the mischief. Aw, yes, I have seen one or two; I had my young days; well

I remember that some of the girls were not always so shy and innocent as you might think, when there was a bunch of nettles to be put in your bed, and a ghost waiting for you behind the door. We had the fine evenings those evenings." Here Long Lauchie, moved to sentiment by his recollections, burst into gentle melody ; but there was not much of sadness—there was rather triumph—in his singing :

*"'Twas on a simmer's afternoon,
A wee before the sun gaed down,
My lassie, in a braw new gown,
Cam' o'er the hills to Gowrie.'*

Lauchlan, looking all round the landscape, smiled mysteriously at these reminiscences of his. But presently he resumed :

"Oh, yes, I tell you, my brave champion, I have seen many pretty girls in my time, brown-haired, and yellow-haired, and black-haired ; and all of them so smooth-spoken and pleasing ; and giving themselves airs as if they had the tail of a peacock to display. But it is a different thing—and now I am telling you the Bible truth—it is a very different thing when you take one of them and make a wife of her, and then the devil's daughter lets you know where she came

from. Niall, my boy, you will be saved from all that, as it is my hope ; and you will be thankful to Providence that you are a little weak in the head. Not that I am so sure about that either. For I have heard of the great commanders—I have heard of Wellington, and Lord Raglan, and Colin Campbell that was at the Alma ; but could any one of them have driven that fearful woman fleeing out of the house ? Not one of them ; they would have run away themselves ; and the faster they went the better for them—that is my opinion. But you—it is you that have a head on your shoulders—and plenty of invention in it—and no mistake ! And now we will see if we can make the farmer's son dance—aw, Dyeea, how I am wishing to see the brown man climbing out of the barrel ! ”

At this point Lauchlan began to moderate his too garrulous mirth ; for they were getting near to Kingarra ; and he understood from Niall's stealthy and furtive manner that there might be some danger of their being observed. But they reached the shelter of the elder-bushes in safety ; and then it was that Lauchlan, out of thankfulness—or perhaps owing to another twinge of toothache — brought forth the soda-water

bottle again. At present there was nothing else to be done, for there was an old woman in possession of the farm-yard—an old woman in a red jacket who was hurling stones and execrations at a terrier that she had caught in the act of scattering a brood of young turkeys.

But in a minute or two, when the old woman had disappeared into one of the out-houses, Niall stole from his hiding-place; and after a careful and cat-like scrutiny he clambered over the gate. He went quickly across the square. In the middle, towards which four shallow troughs—one from each corner of the yard—sloped down and converged, there was a huge tun, the top of which was flush with the ground; while on the further side rose an iron pump. To this pump Niall rapidly affixed one end of the rosined cord, and then he retreated, paying out the string, and dabbing it down on the earth and stones so that it should be immovable and invisible. When he came crouching back behind the elder-bushes, he had the other end in his hand; at any moment a powerful jerk would raise the darkened twine some two or three inches from the ground, so that an unwary passer-by must inevitably go over.

And as it chanced the very next person to put in an appearance was the farmer's son—a great hulking lout of a fellow—who had a pitchfork over his shoulder. The shoemaker, holding his breath, was sniggering in spite of himself; but his companion was in a different mood—the strange, elfin eyes were burning with fire—they were like the eyes of some wild animal intently watching its prey. The unhappy thing was that though the lumbering, heavy-shouldered youth seemed to have plenty of half-idle jobs to do about the yard, never once did he approach the drainage barrel; if he crossed the string, it was at such a distance from the black hole that tripping him up would have been of no avail. They waited and watched, and waited and watched; but with a maddening persistence he kept away from the neighbourhood of that most unholy well. At last Long Lauchie whispered—

“Niall, my son, it is you that have the invention; but this time it is not going to succeed——”

“Quiet—quiet!” retorted the half-witted lad, trembling with excitement. “Now he is coming—now—now——”

But again the unsuspecting yokel sheered

off; and at this Lauchie rose from his cramped position.

“Niall,” he said, laughing covertly, “now I will take my turn; for it is into that hole the devil must go somehow. Stay where you are—stay where you are, my son—and maybe you will be seeing something.”

He now issued boldly from his ambush; he opened the gate; he staggered into the yard. Perhaps he was pretending to be a good deal more intoxicated than was really the case; he held the almost empty bottle in his hand; he swayed up to the farmer's son—who regarded this intruder with evident disfavour.

“It is not ahl feenished yet,” said Lauchie, in English. “Will you be for having a drop?—I was on my weh home—and how is your father, Dan?—ay, and your mother too?—”

“Oh, what are you bletherin about!” returned the other, with impatient sulkiness. “My mother has been dead these seven years——”

“Ay, that's what I was thinking,” Lauchie went on, most good-naturedly—though his speech was interrupted now and again by an occasional hiccough. “And—and I'm glad to hear that; and you will give her my

compliments, and tell her that I was asking after her. And you will hef a drop with me now—it is not ahl feenished——”

“I am not tasting,” was the morose answer.

“Well, well, then, there’s the more for me,” said Lauchlan, cheerfully, and he put the bottle in his pocket. “And your father now, is he well?—and your mother—are they both of them pretty well?——”

“Oh, get out of this—get away home!” was the scornful rejoinder.

“And I was hearing of you to-day,” proceeded Lauchie. “I was hearing of the fine trick you were playing on Niall Gorach—and—and he would be rolling along the road like a football——”

The big booby condescended to grin. But of a sudden Lauchlan grew preternaturally grave.

“Maybe,” said he, half articulately, “maybe I was having a drop too much the day. Give me your arm, Dan, my lad—give me your arm to the gate—I am wishing to get away home——”

“Ay, the sooner ye’re in bed the better,” answered the facetious bumpkin; but by this time Lauchie had fastened on to him, and

rather unwillingly he was being dragged across the yard.

“Here, do ye want to drown yourself!” he exclaimed angrily, as Lauchie’s reeling and staggering took them both dangerously near the pump.

The next moment the intoxicated shoemaker gave a heavy lurch forward—his companion was thrown over and could not recover himself—there was a mighty souse and a kicking and splashing—and the last that Lauchie saw of the farmer was a pair of hands frantically clinging to the edge of the unspeakable tun. He made away for the gate, and haled Niall Gorach out of his hiding-place.

“Aw, Dyeea, did you see that now?” he cried, as they hastened along the road—and he laughed and better laughed until he brought on the hiccough so violently that it threatened to choke him. “Niall, my son, hurry, hurry; but as soon as we are near the houses we are safe; for you do not think a brown man would come near the houses? The brown man—aw, the brown man!—it is I who would like to see him chasing us through Duntroone, and his clothes dripping, and all the people standing and laughing. And

what do you think, now, my hero?—he was very clever when he pushed you down from the coach—oh, yes, he was very clever—but maybe he is not considering himself so clever now. What do you say to that, my son?”

“Will he get any of it into his mouth?” said Niall Gorach, with his eyes burning again.

But the shoemaker was not in the least inclined to be vindictive. He was far too happy. He was giggling to himself, and singing little snatches of song, all the way in to Duntroone; and when he arrived he made straight for one of his favourite howffs, sure of finding there on a Saturday evening some particular crony, to whom, over a friendly glass or two, he could relate his exploit, with such mirthful embellishments as happened to occur to him. And thus it was that Niall Gorach was avenged.

CHAPTER XV.

PERPLEXITIES.

WHEN the two Maclean girls came out of church on the following day, Jess seemed disinclined to accede to Barbara's proposal that they should go for a stroll along the sea-front; indeed, at this time of the year, when the hotels and villas were filled with visitors, the townspeople mostly kept away from the fashionable throng.

"Do you want to see some one?" Jessie demanded. "Or do you wish to have your head turned with fine bonnets and the new style of jackets? I never knew the like of you, Barbara, for thinking about dress."

"I do not wish to sit in the house all day reading books," said Barbara, resentfully.

"Oh, well, I will go with you," said Jess, with her usual good-nature. "I need not be

over shy ; they're not likely to look much at me, Barbara, when they've you to look at."

But hardly had they got down to the front when Jess exclaimed—

"Why, there is Allan ! Who would have expected to find him here !"

At the same moment Barbara's face flushed with vexation. For where was the flower she had counselled him to wear in his button-hole ; and where were the smart gloves and the tall hat ? He did not seem to have altered his dress in any one particular ; he had taken no trouble to fit himself for this promenade ; it was as if he had risen from his musty books and come out without a thought of appearances. And this was the result—that she had dressed herself in her best—and brought her scarlet sunshade too—to walk up and down with a long, gawky, ill-attired student.

When he came up she received him with the most marked coldness ; she would hardly look his way ; she left him to talk to Jess—while she regarded, covertly, the people passing to and fro along the parade. And it was in this fashion also that these three set out together—keeping rather to the roadway, for the gay world had possession of the

pavement. Allan could not but be conscious of the inexplicable change in her manner; but he did not betray either surprise or chagrin; while Jessie remained kind as always.

"I finished the Memoirs this morning," said she, "and I will send you the book back to-morrow, with many thanks."

"And what do you think of the great Benvenuto?" he asked.

"I would not like to say anything disrespectful," Jess answered, demurely, "but—but I was thinking to myself once or twice that 'aiblins he was a leear.' Do you remember," she went on, with a laugh—and she had a pretty laugh, quiet, and happy, and humorous—"do you remember the story of the salamander? He says that when he was a small boy he saw a salamander in the fire; and that there and then his father struck him a blow on the side of the head, so that he should never forget it. That is his story. But I suspect what really happened was this—that he declared he saw a salamander; and that there and then his father hit him on the side of the head to try to cure him of lying. Isn't that the more likely story, Allan?"

"Indeed it is," said he. "And you're

quite right : we've got to guess at what really happened in former times. How do you think, now, that Socrates came by his broken nose ? ”

“ His wife ? ” Jess suggested vaguely.

“ No, no. It is perfectly clear what happened. Socrates had got hold of an honest citizen, and right or wrong, would engage him in argument, just for showing off. Then the poor man, finding himself being driven into a corner by a mere trick of logic—feeling that he was being entrapped, and yet not clever enough to get out—and not liking to be bullied and made a fool of before his friends—then he got angry : he up with his fist and gave the philosopher a bloody nose. That was the *argumentum ad hominem*, you see ; and I suppose Socrates thought he had had enough for that day.”

Benvenuto Cellini—Socrates : no wonder Barbara ceased to listen ; and turned away with proud indifference from her two companions ; and devoted her attention to the fashionable crowd, whose costume, and gait, and bearing had ever and always for her the profoundest interest. She was accustomed to being left by herself in this way. When those two got together, there seemed to be no

end to the subjects on which they could talk ; while she was relegated to silence. And perhaps on this particular morning—seeing that every now and again she was aware of a scrutinising glance sent across from the passers-by—perhaps it was just as well that Allan Henderson should pass for Jess's especial friend ; his appearance (in Barbara's eyes) did not confer distinction on his associate for the time being.

Indeed, she got away from this too public thoroughfare as soon as ever she could ; and the moment she and Jess were back home again and in the seclusion of their own room, her petulance broke forth.

“He was a fine-like sight to come walking with any one !” she said, in mingled wrath and scorn.

“Do you mean Allan ?” said Jess, wondering. “He was just as usual.”

“But people are not supposed to be dressed as usual,” retorted Barbara, “when they go along the esplanade on a Sunday.”

“Dressed ?” repeated her cousin, rather angrily. “He was well enough dressed. He was perfectly well dressed. And, in any case, those that know Allan will not judge of him by his coat.”

“And how is a stranger to judge of him except by his coat?” demanded Barbara: she did not notice that Jessie’s fair and fine complexion had acquired an unusual touch of colour.

“If a stranger,” said Jess, with proud lips, “does not see that Allan Henderson is a man of strong and remarkable character—if he does not see that in every line of his face—then the stranger is a fool. And the opinion of a fool is not worth considering.”

“Oh, you need not get into a temper,” observed Barbara, tauntingly. “It would be of better use if you lent the schoolmaster a clothes-brush.”

“His clothes are perfectly well brushed,” said Jess, hotly, “and perfectly becoming. Perfectly becoming! I wish I could say as much for every one who was there this morning. For there are people who deck themselves out above their station, in imitation of their betters.”

It was a cruel speech—and utterly unlike Jess: nay, she stopped abruptly and hesitated. After all, this cousin of hers had been thrown upon their generosity and hospitality; and she was a solitary kind of creature.

“Barbara,” Jess went on, after this momentary pause, “I am sorry I said that. I was not meaning it. You provoked me.”

“Oh, you may say what you like,” replied Barbara, with assumed indifference, as she put the red parasol down at the bottom of the drawer and covered it over; “it is an old story—that nobody must utter a word about the schoolmaster if you are anywhere near by.”

That same evening Allan Henderson was alone in his own room, seated at an open window, and plunged in profound meditation. For there were many problems he had to face at this crisis. His reason was battling for the mastery; and was pointing out to him that if he wished to withdraw from what he vaguely felt to be a false position, Barbara’s inexplicably capricious conduct offered an opportune excuse. Even in the midst of his infatuation—even as he dreaded to think of losing her—he was haunted by a distressing consciousness that she was in no sense his equal, that she was not the mate he would have chosen if there had been a choice in the matter. But was there a choice? Or was the pairing of men and women a haphazard thing; and was its

accidental character the cause of all the mistakes and tragedies that were visible around? And what was the nature of this, subtle allurements and fascination that was so much more powerful than the will of a man, and that paid no heed whatever to his judgment? But then again, if he was driven to confess to himself that Barbara could be no intellectual helpmeet for him—that she was ignorant and simple in a hundred directions—might not that be part of her mysterious charm? Here was a child of nature, to be taken by the hand and led; here was a virgin tablet on which the finer wisdom of the world could be written anew; here was a wild blossom, to be trained and guided, while one wonderingly watched its growth. And after all, was not the over-riding of reason—the yielding to a blind intoxication of the senses—at a particular juncture in life—was not that but obeying one of the fundamental laws of existence? Who could tell but that there were other powers at work in this business of selection—inscrutable and inexorable powers? Could there be any sorrier spectacle than that of some poor item of humanity, hanging back, consulting his judgment, with ‘I will—I will not,’ while

the inherited influences of millions of centuries were imperatively saying to him, 'There is the woman we have chosen for you : her you must seek to gain, and none other. If you fail, then you have balked our purpose—away with you to the limbo of discomfiture and despair !'

These dark and intricate communings were broken in upon : Mr. McFadyen appeared—merry-eyed, alert, self-confident.

" Well, to be sure ! " he exclaimed. " All by yourself, on a fine evening like this ! I made sure you would be entertaining your friends at supper, or something of the kind, after what I saw yesterday. Did I not prophesy it, many's the day ago ? And a smart young madam to go walking through the town wi' !—Dod, she's a clipper !—there's style about her, I tell ye—a regular young Queen of Sheba—— "

" Are you talking of Barbara Maclean ? " said the schoolmaster. " But that was twenty-four hours ago. And twenty-four hours in the life of a woman—— "

" What—what now ? " cried the councillor, in great surprise : he could see that something had occurred.

" I saw her this morning," said Allan,

briefly. "She had hardly a word for me."

"Man, man, is that all?" responded Peter, with hearty cheerfulness. "Do ye no understand? That's only their tricks, man! They're all like that. They're well aware that if they kept aye in the same temper, they would lose interest for ye; and so one day it's all smiles and sunshine, and the next day it's nothing but discontent and perversity. Come away, now—come away this very minute; and we'll go along to the widow's——"

Well, Allan was in a half-reckless mood; he hardly knew what was happening to him, what toils and snares were surrounding him. They went to the widow's. And from her at least they had a most friendly welcome.

"And so the holidays begin to-morrow, Allan, lad," said she. "I'm sure they'll do you good: you've been too hard at work at your classes. And how is your greenhouse getting on, Mr. McFadyen?"

"Oh, fine; just fine," responded the councillor. "There's some may be laughing at me for keeping a bit greenhouse, and a few out-of-door plants cheek by jowl with a coal-yard; but if they had any philosophy

they would know it's just there such a thing is wanted. A touch of verdure—a touch of verdure—it's wonderful how refreshing to the eye it is. And the euonymus bushes are doing well—it's strange they have not oftener been tried in this climate—I'm looking forward to having them green all through the winter. That's the only drawback about the tree-fuchsias—withering down in the winter——”

“It's quite true what ye say, Mr. McFadyen,” observed the widow, placidly. “And one o' these days I must come along and look at your anonymous bushes, when it's such an interesting experiment——”

“The sooner the better,” returned the councillor, politely. “The sooner the better. And in the meantime I am going to insist on Miss Jessie and Miss Barbara here putting on their things and coming away for half-an-hour's stroll: it's just sinful they should be sitting indoors on so splendid an evening.”

And he did insist—stormily, overbearingly—until he had his way; Jess was the first to give a laughing consent; then she and Barbara quitted the room to get ready. When the four of them by-and-bye set out, the councillor was quite gay and triumphant; and it ought to be added that he wore a

most dapper and summerlike costume—white vest, cutaway coat, and variegated necktie. They left the town by the Dunstaffnage road—making for the upland heights overlooking the western and northern seas.

They walked two and two; and the school-master, who had at first been inclined to coldness if not to austerity, very speedily found, and that greatly to his surprise, that his companion wished to be complaisant, and even ingratiating.

“You have never told me,” said she, in rather a low voice, when there was some little space between them and the couple ahead of them, “of the fight between you and Ogilvie. I want to know. How did it begin?”

It was the very last thing in the world he would have wished to talk about; but she was insidiously persistent; she betrayed the strangest curiosity about the smallest details; however reluctantly, he was forced to relate to her, bit by bit, what had occurred.

“And you had him at the very edge?” she asked, with ‘glowering’ eyes.

“It was too near for both of us.”

“But he was the undermost—you had the mastery over him?” she demanded.

He would not say.

“He was the undermost—did you not tell me that?” she demanded again.

“Well—he was.”

“Then why did you not let him go over?” she said, with set teeth.

He was astounded.

“Barbara, do you know what you are saying! Would you have had murder committed?”

“It would have been no murder!” she said, passionately. “It was a fair fight—he would have had you over if he could. Well, maybe you will be serving him better some other day—and more to the purpose!”

He could not understand this savage outburst; but he dared not question her further; for the two in front of them had paused in the roadway, to inquire which route they should now adopt. It was by this time nearly nine; the sun had set; but there was no lack of light—the after-glow seemed to have set the whole world on fire. Indeed, when they had decided to go onwards and downwards to the sea, and when they had reached the heights above Penyfuir, a most extraordinary spectacle lay stretched out before them: the smooth waters of Loch Linnhe

were as a lake of blood, the heavens overhead were an indescribable glory of flame, while between the resplendent crimson sea and the dazzling crimson sky stood ranged the mountains of Morven, of the richest, deepest, softest plum-colour, the only apparently solid thing in this wild and general conflagration. The night was yet far off—if there was to be any night; they would have abundant leisure for their return through the woods along the shore.

And so they descended from these uplands to the coast, making their way round by Ganavan and Camas Ban and through the trees that encircle the base of the Castle Hill. The councillor was in great form; he was drawing attention, as if he owned them, to the various objects that came within view; he was displaying his knowledge of natural history. A large dark bird with noiseless wings went sailing from one branch to another; then a sharp, discordant yelp—a strange sound in the prevailing silence—proclaimed the tawny owl. A smaller creature—black as jet against that blaze of crimson light—kept jerkily fluttering over their heads; and Peter repeated the boyish rhyme ‘Bat, bat, come into my hat!’;

though, having attained to years of wisdom, he did not fruitlessly attempt to capture the flitter-mouse. A belated weasel stole along the pathway some distance ahead of them, and then disappeared in among the heaps of stones tumbled down from the lofty ruins. But it was when they had got round by the old-fashioned garden to the corner of the bay that the councillor had an opportunity of really distinguishing himself; for at this point a rabbit, closely followed by a black collie, ran across just in front of them, the pursued animal making for the ivied and precipitous cliff underneath the Castle.

“Ah, do you see that now?” cried Mr. McFadyen, grasping his stick by the ferrule end. “That poaching rascal of a dog!—if I could get at him I’d teach him a lesson! The mongrel beasts!—they don’t belong to the place—they come in from the town—I wonder the keeper does not shoot every one o’ them—and that black thief of a brute, I’d just like to get near it——”

Nay, so indignant was he that he left his companions and began to ascend the steep hill. Both rabbit and collie had got out of sight: no doubt the former had reached the

shelter of the ivy, and made its way into one of the numerous crevices well-known in these parts to the coney of the rock. But the dog?—well, the dog must be somewhere about—and here was the valiant Peter, determined on lawful castigation. The next moment Mr. McFadyen paused. The black collie having relinquished the chase, was now returning; and when it caught sight of this stranger, it stopped short. The two glared at each other—and Mr. McFadyen did not advance.

“I’m not so sure,” he called down to Jess, “that this is a town dog. It may belong to the place, after all——”

There was a low growl, ending in a sharp and menacing bark.

“What do ye think?” the councillor called again. “I would not like to harm a dog that belonged here——”

The barking was renewed, with a more savage accent; the collie, showing angry teeth, was drawing nearer.

“He deserves a thrashing, of course,” called Peter, with some tone of apology. “No doubt about that. But—but maybe it would be best to leave that to the keeper. What do ye think? I would not like to

harm the dog if I thought it belonged to the place. What do ye think?—”

“Oh, come away, Mr. McFadyen, and leave the dog alone!” Jess called to him.

It was with a certain caution that Peter began to back down the slope; and when he rejoined his companions his face was extremely red—perhaps with the exertion of climbing and descending again.

“I’m not sure I was right in letting him off,” he said, doubtfully. “Maybe I was wrong in letting him off. When you catch a poaching dog in the very act, ye should thrash him then and there. But on the other hand, ye see, I would not like to punish a dog that belonged to the place—that would hardly be my business, would it? Oh, well,” he concluded, with a magnanimous air, “maybe it was better to let him go for this once anyway: I thought he might have the benefit of the doubt.”

“Yes, yes; why should you want to harm the poor beast?” said Jess; and therewith they continued on their route—round by the curve of the shore, towards the out-jutting rocks.

Barbara was silent and self-absorbed on the way home. For while these others had

been watching the encounter between Mr. McFadyen and the black collie, she had been regarding the steep cliff that towered away upwards to the ruins of the ancient castle. It was over that cliff that Ogilvie would have fallen headlong if the schoolmaster had not released him and given him his life.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RING.

NEXT morning, to Barbara's surprise, Allan Henderson presented himself; and the first glimpse she had of him showed her that there was a marked change in his outward appearance—he wore a suit of light grey Harris homespun, and he had discarded his slouched felt hat for a wideawake of the ordinary kind. He at once explained the object of his visit; the summer school-vacation had begun; he was a free man once more; and now he wanted to know whether she would not lay aside her work and come away with him for an hour or two's ramble in the country. It was a bold request, truly, considering the capricious and uncertain fashion in which she had been treating him of late; but perhaps with this newly-found liberty certain daring,

or even desperate, hopes and fancies had got hold of him.

She seemed to regard the holiday look—the off-duty look—of his attire with distinct approval.

“But what is the use of the country?” she said. “There is nothing to see. And it is too early. If you come back about half-past twelve, I can be ready then; and we will go somewhere.”

He was far too well pleased with her compliance to think of hurrying her; he went away, and loitered up and down the esplanade, scanning the various yachts; then at the appointed hour he returned. It was obvious that some portion at least of the interval Barbara had devoted to decorating herself for this expedition. The young Queen of Sheba, as Mr. McFadyen had called her, was well bedight.

Nor had he ever before found her so gracious. They had got but a little way from the house when they came to the chief fruit-and-flower shop in Duntroone; and here she stopped.

“Come in for a moment,” said she, “and I will get you something to wear in your buttonhole.”

“Thank you, Barbara,” said he, hanging back—with something of an impatient frown as well—“but I do not care about such things.”

She would not be denied. She bade him wait. She went into the shop, and chose one or two flowers, tying the stems together; and when she came out again, she herself pinned the little nosegay into the lapel of his coat. He forgot his ill-temper—her kindness was so manifest, and so unexpected.

“You are no longer a schoolmaster,” she said with a laugh; “you are just like the other young men now. And some day when I have enough pocket-money I will be buying you a pair of gloves.”

“Gloves?” he repeated. “They are not much in my way, Barbara.”

“Ah, but I see that you can make yourself very nice-looking when you choose,” she went on. “And now you are no longer the schoolmaster; now it is the holidays; and you will be having plenty of time to dress well and look after yourself when you go out for a walk.”

Indeed, she was quite animated; and as they passed round by the harbour and approached the South Pier—to which the

Aros Castle had just come in—she became still more blithe and communicative. The schoolmaster had not chosen this route; she had, unperceived by him, led the way; it mattered little to him whither they wandered, so long as he and she were together. But on this occasion it became clear that Barbara did not mean to ignore the presence of the Purser. On the contrary, as they were passing the moored steamer, she stared boldly at him—until Ogilvie averted his eyes, and went on with his work; and she talked floutingly and with open scorn; it seemed as though she was not at all unwilling that her taunts should be overheard.

“The poor fellow!” she exclaimed. “No wonder he is angry that he has to look after herring-barrels! He is not much better than a railway-porter—do you think it is being any better than a railway-porter?——”

“Quiet, quiet, Barbara!” her companion said. “Let him alone. You need not look his way, nor he yours.”

“Some day will you take Jessie and me for a sail to Tobermory?” she demanded.

In other circumstances he would gladly have welcomed the proposal; but there was something he did not understand about the

relations between Barbara and the Purser ; a trip to Tobermory—if it was to be on board the *Aros Castle*, with Ogilvie passing to and fro—might involve a good deal of embarrassment. But in the meantime they were leaving the South Pier behind ; Barbara, for the sake of her pride, appeared to make some effort to recover her equanimity ; and soon they were toiling up the slopes of the Gallows Hill, on their way to the lofty plateau and its spacious view of mountain, cloud, and sea.

And surely this was a day fitted for the allaying of tempestuous passions—now as these two seated themselves on the bench at the foot of the flagstaff ; a brooding, calm, and peaceful day ; nor yet a day of gloom, for the soft, white, woolly skies showed here and there a silvery glow as if the sun were trying to break through the thin transparent veil. There was hardly a breath of wind ; the pale leaden-hued or lilac plain of waters did not stir ; a solitary yacht hung idle off the point of Lismore. The ivied ruins of the Castle were dark and distinct and intense against the luminous heavens ; but the far hills in the west and north seemed to have receded until they had grown aerial and

visionary—mere ghosts of mountains. And everywhere a prevailing silence, in which could be heard the throb of the paddles of the steamer, on her way across to the North Pier.

And whither had fled now all the problems, the doubts and hesitations, the perplexities with which he had been torturing himself? He and she were together, the sweet summer air around them; the world lay brilliant and beautiful before them; the mysterious attraction and allurements of youth was a trembling and inexplicable delight. And she was bland and complaisant; a marvellous thing; he knew not how it had all come about. What did it matter if abstruse mental and moral enigmas were all a blank to her, so long as the wisps and curls of her raven-black hair clung caressingly about her ears and neck, so long as her smile said more than any words, so long as heaven seemed to shine in the liquid deeps of her eyes? Perhaps she did not know much of the story of dead and gone generations; but for every man and woman the all-important time was their own time; the universe for them was the universe in which they found themselves alive; and here was one who could surround herself—and perhaps a neighbour or two—

with an atmosphere of unimaginable glamour. The charm of books, and forgotten languages, and distant peoples?—there was a stranger charm when she turned her out-curving lashes towards him, timid, shy, half-coquettish as she might chance to be.

Little need was there for talk; to be so near to her was enough; and yet the one consuming thought and desire of his mind drove him on to speech.

“Barbara,” he said, in a low voice—for there were one or two people seated on another bench some dozen or fifteen yards away—“you were kind enough to offer me a pair of gloves. I wish you would accept a little present from me—that would mean more than that—that would mean a good deal more than that——”

“A present?” she repeated—and her eyes were pleased and expectant.

“A ring,” he said. “Would you wear a ring if I gave it to you?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered, without a moment’s hesitation.

“But do you understand?” he went on. “Do you understand what the significance would be?”

The jet-black lashes were lowered now.

“ Maybe—I do not know,” she said.

“ Well, your wearing the ring would be a promise—a promise that you will be my wife. Will you wear the ring, Barbara ? ”

“ Yes,” she said.

There was no affectation of coyness or fluttering alarm ; there was a touch of pride, of defiance almost, in her tone ; but in his delirium of happiness he took no heed of such trifles. Nay, so anxious and eager was he to make secure the prize he had thus unexpectedly won—and won in such an amazingly simple fashion—that he would have her go away down with him, there and then, to Mr. Boyd the jeweller’s, that this fateful trinket might straightway be chosen. And Barbara seemed nothing loth ; she rose to her feet.

“ Will they be thinking it strange,” said she, “ if they see me wearing a ring ? ”

“ Why, of course not,” he said, joyfully enough. “ An engagement-ring is nothing out of the common. If any one is curious, you can explain ; but they will all get to know—and the sooner the better.”

She did not appear to be at all overwhelmed by the gravity of the step she had just taken. As they were going away down and into the town, he was recalling to her certain things

that had happened since the night of the wreck of the *Sanda*, to prove to her that this goal he had triumphantly reached at last he had been aiming at all along. But she interrupted him.

"Oh," she said, "it is no use looking back. All that is gone away and done. The present is enough."

"Indeed it is," said he. "And it would be marvellous if I were not to think so."

When these two went into the shop, Mr. Boyd, glancing from one to the other, seemed a little astonished; but of course he made no remark; it was only when Allan asked to be shown one or two plain gold rings that the jeweller revealed what was passing in his mind.

"Ay, is it a wedding-ring then?" he asked.

At this Barbara did betray some slight confusion; but Allan stepped in to shield her.

"No, no," said he, goodhumouredly. "Not yet. You're in a hurry, Mr. Boyd. It's only a little present I was thinking of——"

"Oh, yes, to be sure," said the shopkeeper, instantly retreating from his false position, and finding safety in a study of his window,

from which he presently extracted a small case of his glittering wares.

Now in the natural course of things it was for Allan to make his choice, subject to her approval; but it very soon appeared that these two were not of one mind in this matter. The schoolmaster's fancy had been attracted by a simple gold hoop—a piece of delicate chain-work set in a narrow band; 18-carat the metal was, and the price marked on the little ticket was twenty-five shillings. But Barbara was clearly disappointed.

“It is so plain,” said she, with just a touch of petulance. “It is nothing—no one would notice it——”

“Maybe you would like something more showy?” Mr. Boyd suggested—and he brought out another case. “This is a very nice one.”

Well, the ring he now placed before her was certainly a more gaudy ornament—it professed to be of rubies and diamonds, the stones alternating; while the ticketed price was only fifteen shillings. When Barbara took it in her hand, her eyes lit up with unmistakeable pleasure.

“Yes,” she said, “that is something to look at—that is something that can be seen.”

"But, Barbara," remonstrated the school-master, almost angrily, "you don't want to wear imitation things, do you? These stones are not real, Mr. Boyd?—of course not, at that price."

"Oh, no; they're imitations; but they're very good imitations," answered the jeweller. "And the setting is gold—12-carat gold."

"It is very pretty, whatever," said Barbara, regarding the bauble with fascinated eyes; and she tried it on her finger to see how it looked there also.

Allan was vexed and chagrined; but how could he quarrel with her on this morning of all mornings? She had just given herself to him—he had just won the crown of life; and was he to refuse her her choice of a trumpery gewgaw?

"Well, if you wish it," he said. "But I should have thought you would have preferred something real—not bits of glass——"

"Then if I am not to have it, I am not to have it," she said, shortly; and she pulled the ring off her finger, and tossed it aside. "Show me some others."

"But if you would rather have it, Barbara——" he was saying, to pacify her, when she again interrupted him.

“I am not caring for it any longer. Some other one—it is no matter which it is.”

And eventually a compromise was arrived at. It is true that the ring she ultimately accepted cost more than either of the others—cost him well over a week’s salary; but at least the rosette of garnets which it bore consisted of genuine stones. And there certainly was more display in this deep crimson ornament than in the plain gold hoop that he had at first offered her.

They did not continue their expedition further at this time; but before they parted, Allan promised to come along in the evening: he was impatient to let Mrs. Maclean and Jessie know of the great change that had taken place in his fortunes and prospects. They were to learn of it before then. On her way home Barbara called in at the shop; and Jess, from behind the counter, was not slow in descrying the pretty trinket.

“Well, Barbara, you are the one for setting yourself off!” she exclaimed. “And where did you get such a beautiful thing as that?”

“The schoolmaster,” said Barbara, with a laugh and a blush.

Jess was silent only for a second.

"Then—then it is settled between him and you?" she asked, diffidently.

"Oh, yes, we are to be married," replied Barbara—still regarding the ring. "Will you tell your mother, Jessie, that Allan is coming along to-night?"

"Yes, I will tell her. But—but don't you expect me to say something, Barbara? For I am sure I wish that both of you may be very happy—I am sure I wish that."

"And I am sure of this," said the girl—touched by the tone in which these words were spoken—"I am sure of this, Jessie, that no one can say you are not very kind to those about you." And therewith she left.

All that long afternoon—after she had confided these tidings to her mother—the ordinarily light-hearted Jess was strangely pre-occupied and silent.

"It is my head—it is nothing," she would say, in answer to her mother's inquiries; and then again she would struggle on with her accounts.

But at last she gave up.

"Would you mind attending to the shop, mother?" she said, with rather a tired air.

"I would like to go for a little walk——"

"But you will be back when Allan calls?"

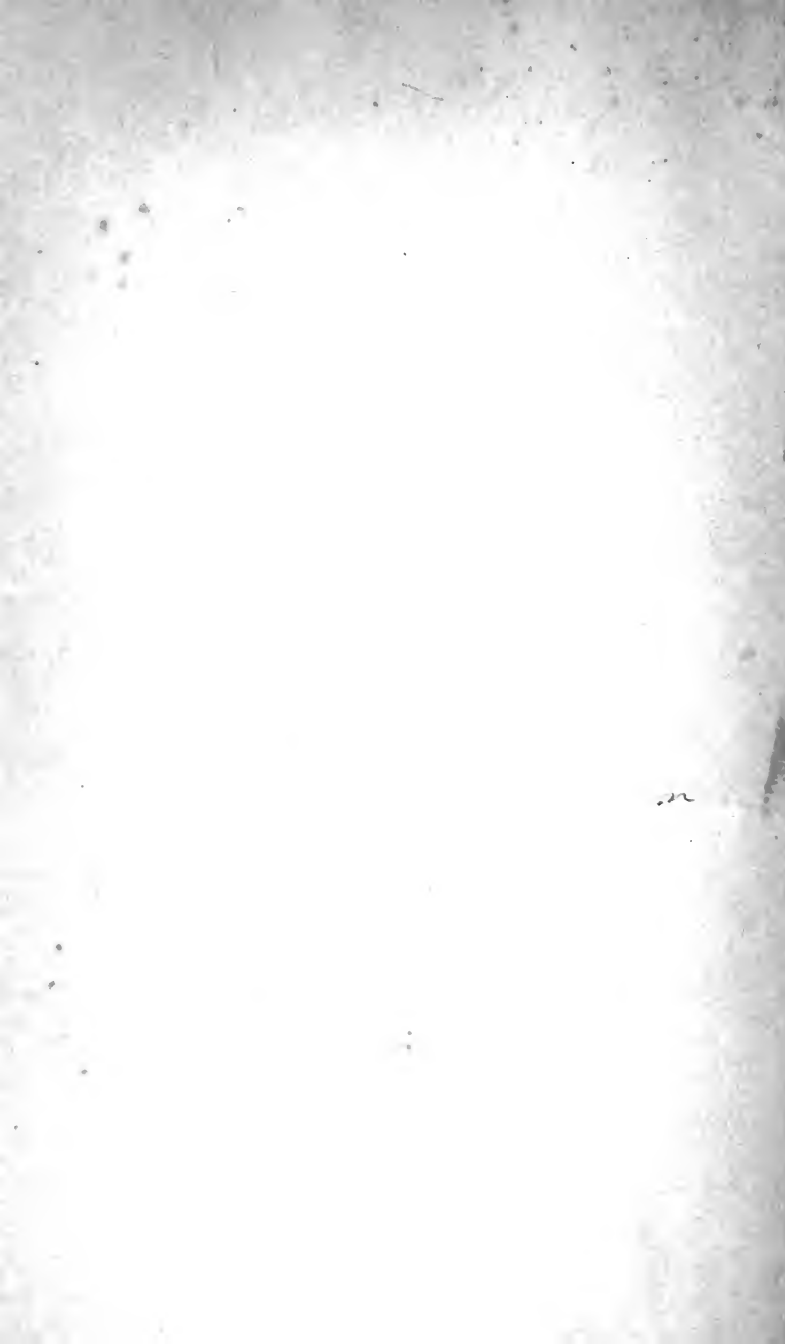
the widow said. "He will be expecting your congratulations——"

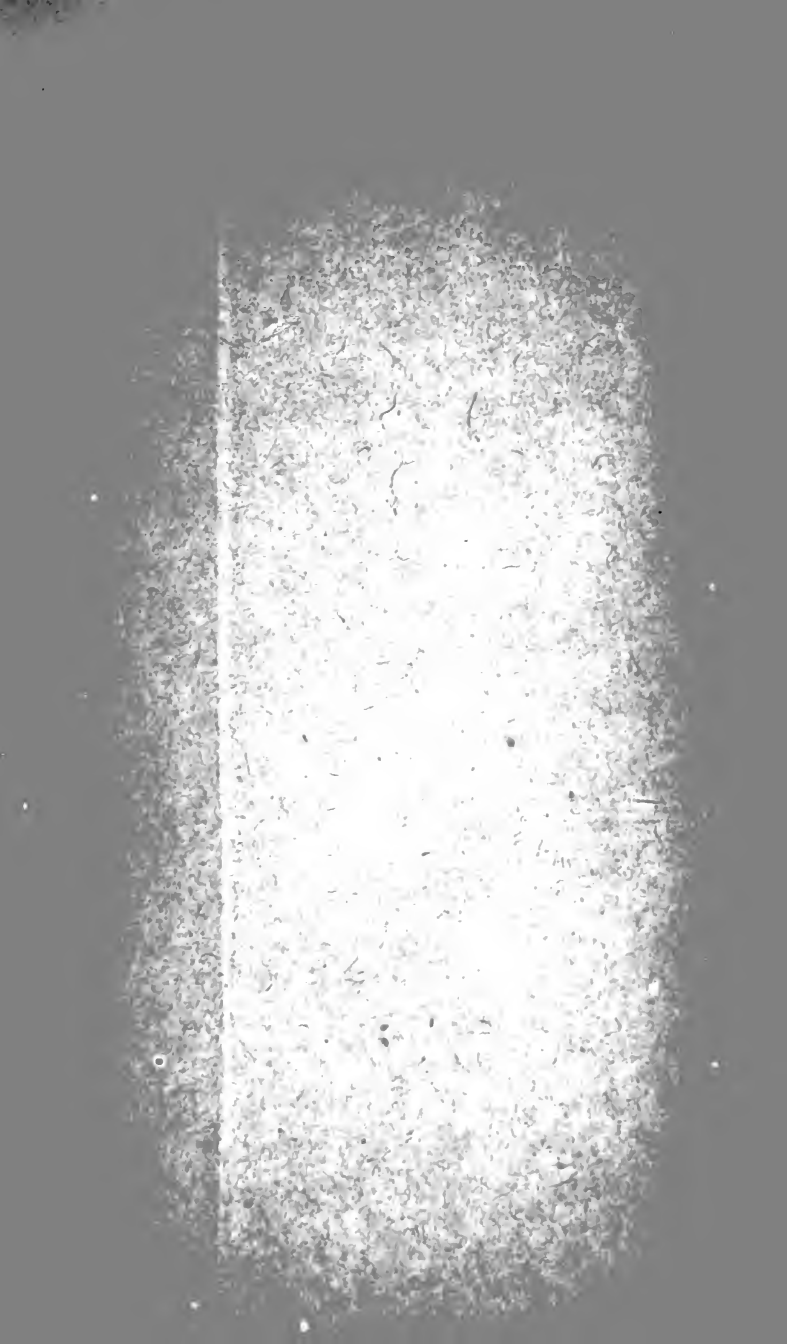
"Yes, maybe I will be back," Jess said. "Maybe. But if I am not, you will give him my best wishes, mother, and tell him I hope they will both be very happy. But he knows that—he knows that is what I am wishing for both of them."

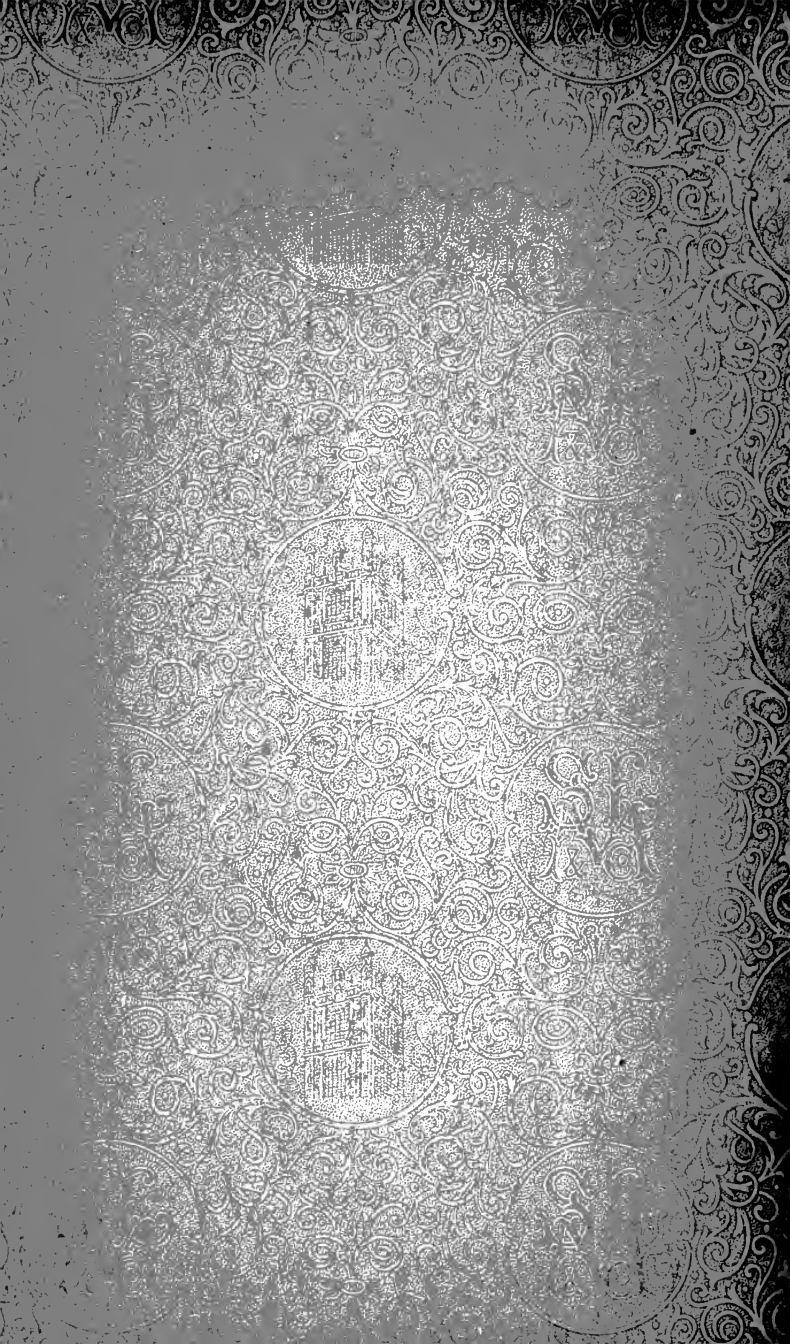
And so she got away; and by unfrequented paths she stole out into the moorland country, where she was alone, and glad to be alone. For perhaps 'the foolishness was on her:' and if the 'wild tears' must fall, she would not have any one know her shame.

END OF VOL. II.









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